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# CATHERINE BLUM.

## CHAPTER I.

### PROLOGUE.

"You were saying to me yesterday, my boy:—

"'Dear papa, you don't write enough books like *Conscience.*'

"To which I replied:—

"'You know very well that I do everything you wish. Tell me what kind of book you want, and you shall have it.'

"Whereupon you added:—

"'Very well then! I should like one of those stories of your early youth, one of those little dramas of which the world knows nothing, which are acted under the shadow of the huge trees of that beautiful forest whose mysterious depths have made you a dreamer, whose melancholy murmurings have made you a poet; one of those occurrences or passages in your life which you sometimes relate to our family circle as a relaxation from those long romantic epics which you compose,—occurrences which, according to your own account, are not worth the trouble of being written. I have learned to love your native country, of which I know nothing, and which I have only seen at a distance, through your own reminiscences of the past, as one sees a landscape in a dream.'

"And I, too, love my native place, my own dear village! for it is barely more than a village, although it calls itself a town, and assumes the importance of a city; I love it enough to weary, not you, my friend, but the idle and indifferent about it. I am, with respect to Villers-Cotterets, precisely as old Rusconi was with regard to Colmar. For him Colmar was the centre of the earth, the axis of the globe; for him, the universe turned round Colmar; it was at Colmar that he became acquainted with everybody.

"'*Where did you know* Carrel, Rusconi?'—'I conspired

with him at Colmar in 1821.' 'Talma — where did you become acquainted with Talma, Rusconi?'—'I saw him perform at Colmar in 1816.' 'Napoleon—where did you know Napoleon, Rusconi?'—'I saw him pass through Colmar in 1808.' And so it is with me; everything with me dates from Villers-Cotterets, as everything dates from Colmar for Rusconi.

"With one exception, however, namely, that Rusconi had over me the advantage or disadvantage, whichever it might be, of not having been born at Colmar; he was born at Mantua, that ducal city, the country of Virgil and Sordello, whilst I was born at Villers-Cotterets.

"You see, therefore, my child, that it is not necessary to press me very much to get me to talk about my dearly-loved little town, whose white houses, grouped in the background of the horse-shoe formed by its immense forest, look like a nest of birds; while the church, with its tall, straight steeple, watches over it like a mother. You have but to take away from my lips the seal which confines my thoughts and imprisons my words, for words and thoughts to make their escape, brisk and sparkling like the froth of a bottle of beer, which makes us poor exiles call out, when seated together at dinner, and shrink from one another; or like the foam from Champagne, which draws a smile from our lips, and makes us draw more closely to one another, as it reminds us of the sun of our native country.

"And, in point of fact, was it not at Villers-Cotterets that I really and truly lived, since it was there that I awaited life? We live upon hope far more than upon reality. Who or what is it that steeps the horizons in their golden and azure colours? Alas! my poor boy, you will learn, some day or other, that it is hope, and hope alone.

"It was there that I was born; there, where the first cry of pain escaped my lips; there, where, under my mother's eye, my lips first learned to smile; there, where a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked child, I hurried breathlessly in the pursuit of those illusions of youth which, butterfly-like, flee from our grasp, or which, if we succeed in securing them, leave but a little velvet-like dust upon our fingers. Alas! it is as strange as it is true that which I now tell you; we never see beautiful butterflies except in the days of our youth; by-and-by the wasps succeed with their painful stings; and then the bats, the forerunners of death.

"The three epochs of existence may be resumed thus: youth, maturity, old age; butterflies, wasps, bats.

"It was there my father died. At that period I was too young to know what death was, and hardly knew what a father was.

"It was there that I had my dead mother carried; it is in that pretty cemetery, which has more the aspect of a flowery mead where children gambol, than the mournful burial-place where the dead lie in their last sleep; there she slumbers side by side with the soldier of the camp of Maulde and the general of the Pyramids. A stone, with which the hand of a female friend has covered their tomb, shelters them both.

"To the right and left slumber also my grand-parents, the father and mother of my mother, aunts whose names I remember, but whose features I can barely discern throughout the grey vista of long, long years.

"It will be there that I, in my turn, shall seek my last resting-place, as late as possible, I trust in Heaven, for it will be much against my will to leave you, my dear child.

"On that day I shall find lying side by side, not only her who nursed me at her breast, but also her who rocked me to sleep; Mamma Zine, of whom I have spoken in my *Mémoires*.

"Why should I not love to speak of that immense bower of verdure, where every single thing is fraught with memories of the past. I knew every one and every thing yonder; not alone the people of the town, not alone the stones of the houses, but still more the trees of the forest. As these reminiscences of my earlier days passed away one by one, so have I wept over them. Those dear and honoured heads, hoary with age, of the good Abbé Grégoire, the kind Captain Fontaine, worthy old Niguet, and excellent cousin Deviolaine: I have sometimes tried to make you live again; but you have almost terrified me, poor phantoms, for I have found you pale and dumb, in spite of my tender and friendly endeavours to infuse life, or the resemblance of life, into you. I have wept over you, dark stones of the cloisters of St. Rémy, colossal gates, gigantic staircases, narrow cells, cyclopean kitchens, which I have seen crumble into ruins, until the pick and the mattock revealed the foundations, as vast as ramparts, and your cellars yawning like abysses. I have wept over you, more especially over you, beautiful trees of the park, giants of the forest, the offspring of oaks with

their rugged trunks, of beeches with their smooth and silvery bark, trembling poplars, and chestnuts with their pyramid-like flowers, around which, in the months of May and June, swarms of bees, their bodies laden with honey and their feet clogged with wax, thronged murmuringly in ceaseless activity. A few months pass away, and you have fallen suddenly, you who had still so many years to live, so many generations to shelter beneath your leafy covert, so many tender passions to witness, passing mysteriously and noiselessly over the carpet of thick moss which by-gone ages had spread at your feet. You had known François the First and Madame d'Etampes, Henry the Second and Diana de Poitiers, Henry the Fourth and Gabrielle; your carved barks spoke of those illustrious dead ones; you had hoped that those crescents trebly enlaced, that those initials amorously intertwined, that those crowns of laurels and roses, would protect you from the common lot, and from that mercantile cemetery termed a timber-yard. Alas! you were deceived, beautiful trees. One day you heard the ringing sound of the woodman's axe, and the harsh voice of the grating saw—it was destruction that was approaching you! it was death which cried: 'It is your turn now, proud ones of the earth!

"And I saw you lying prone on the ground, mutilated from the roots to the summit, with your scattered branches around you; and it seemed to me that, younger by 5,000 years, I was hurrying across that immense field of battle which lies between Pelion and Ossa, and that I saw extended at my feet those Titans with triple heads and hundred arms, who had tried to scale the heights of Olympus, and whom Jupiter had annihilated.

"If ever you should walk with me leaning upon my arm, dear child of my best affections, amidst those vast woods; if you should pass through those scattered villages, should sit down upon those moss-grown stones, should bend your head towards those tombs, everything will at first seem to you silent and dead; but I will teach you the language of all those old friends of my youth, whether they be living or dead, and you will then understand with what gentle voices they breathe into my ear.

"We will begin our walk by the east, and that is simple enough; the sun seems to you scarcely to have yet risen; its earliest rays dazzle your large blue eyes, which reflect *the azure of* the heavens. First of all, then, we will

pay a visit, bearing somewhat to the south, to that pretty little château of Villers-Hellon, through which, when quite a child, I rambled in heedless joy, seeking amidst the clumps of trees, or through the verdant groves, those living flowers which our sports had dispersed in various directions, and who were called Louise, Augustine, Caroline, Henriette, Hermine. Alas! at the present time, several of those lovely and delicate flowers have perished under the chill blast of death; others are mothers, some even grandmothers. Forty years have passed since the period I speak of, my dear child, you who not until twenty years more shall have passed away will know the meaning of those words 'forty years.'

"Then, in continuing our rambles, we will pass through Lorey. Do you see that steep descent, interspersed with apple-trees, with its base steeped in yon pond, covered with a mantle of green? One day three young men, riding in a *char-à-banc*, were run away with by a stupid or furious horse, they never knew whether it was the one or the other, and tearing along like an avalanche, were plunged head foremost into that kind of Cocytus. Fortunately, one of the wheels was caught in an apple-tree, which was almost torn from its roots by the collision. Two of the young men were thrown over the horse's heads, the other, like Absolom, remained suspended to a branch, not by the hair of his head, although his hair was quite long enough for such an operation, but by the hand. The two young men who had been hurled over the horse's heads were, the one my cousin Hippolyte Leroy, of whom you have heard me occasionally speak; the other, my friend Adolphe de Leuvan, whom you hear me always talking about; the third was myself.

"How would my life have turned out, and, consequently, how would your own, my poor child, had not that apple-tree happened to be in that particular spot, within reach?

"About half a league farther on, still advancing from the east to the south, we shall come upon a large farm. You can see it yonder, the farmhouse itself covered with tiles, and its outbuildings thatched with straw—that is Vouty.

"There, my boy, still lives,—at least, I hope so, although he must now be more than eighty years of age,—a man who has been to my moral life, if I may be allowed the expression, what that kind apple-tree, which I pointed out to you just now, has been to my material life. Look into my memoirs and you will find his name; it is the same old friend of my father *who one day* entered our house on his return from

shooting, with one-half of his left hand carried away by his gun, which had burst. When that strong desire seized me to leave Villers-Cotterets, and to come to Paris, instead of putting a burden on my shoulders and shackles on my limbs, he said to me, 'Go! it is destiny which is urging you on!' and he gave me that famous letter for General Foy which threw open for me the general's hotel, and obtained for me a situation in the duke of Orleans' establishment.

"We will embrace most affectionately this dear, good old man, to whom we owe so much, and will proceed on our way, which will finally bring us out upon a high road at the top of a hill.

"From the summit of that hill gaze upon yon valley, yon river, and yon town.

"That valley and that river are the valley and river of Ouroy, and the town is La Ferté-Milon, the native place of Racine.

"It is useless to descend the hill and to enter into the town; there is no one who can point out to us the house which was inhabited by the rival of Corneille, the ungrateful friend of Molière, the disgraced poet of Louis XIV.

"His works are in every library; his statue, the production of our great sculptor David, is upon the public place; but his house is nowhere, or, rather, the whole town itself, which owes its glory to him, is his house.

"At all events, we do know that Racine was born at La Ferté-Milon, while no one knows where Homer was born.

"And now we will change the direction of our course from the south to the west. That pretty village, which seems as if it had but this very moment sprung out of the forest, to warm itself in the sun's rays, is Boursonne. Do you remember the 'Comtesse de Charny,' one of my works, which you say you like best?—if so, the name of Boursonne is not unfamiliar to you. That little château, in which my old friend Hutin resides, is the château of Isidore Charny; from that château the young gentleman crept stealthily one evening, bending over the neck of his English horse, and in a few minutes he was on the opposite side of the forest, hidden by the shadows projected by these very poplars, and from which retreat he could see Catherine's window open and shut. One night he returned covered with blood—a ball from Père Billot's gun had passed through his arm, another had ripped open his side. And, at last, one day he went out to return no more; he accompanied the king to Montmédy, and remained stark-dead

upon the public place of Varennes, opposite to the house of Sausse the grocer.

"We have now traversed the forest from the south to the west, having passed by Plessy-au-Bois, La Chapelle-aux-Auvergnats, and Coyolles; a few yards further on and we are at the summit of the mountain of Vauciennes.

"About a hundred paces behind us, I found one day, or rather, one evening, as I was returning from Cressy, the corpse of a young man about sixteen years of age. I have described in my memoirs this dark and mysterious drama. The windmill, which is situated on the left of the road, and which slowly and mournfully turns its huge wings round and round, alone knows, with Heaven above, how the affair had happened. Neither broke silence on the subject—human justice struck at random, and happily the assassin, before he fell, confessed that the sentence was a just one.

"The mountain-ridge which we are about to follow, and which overlooks that vast plain upon our right hand, that beautiful valley upon our left, is the theatre of my various field exploits.

"It was there that I made my first appearance in the career of Nimrod and Levaillant, the two greatest hunters, as far as I am permitted to form an opinion, of ancient and modern times. To the right was the resort of hares, partridges, and quails; to the left, that of wild ducks, teal, and snipes. Do you see yon spot of a green far brighter than the others, which looks like a beautiful grass-plot painted by Watteau? It is a bog, in which I very nearly left my bones; I was gently subsiding into it, when fortunately the idea occurred to me to place my gun between my legs. The butt-end on one side and the barrel on the other, happened to meet with ground a little more solid than that in which I was beginning to be swallowed up, and thus I was checked in my vertical descent, which was doubtlessly fast leading me in a direct line to the infernal regions. I called out lustily, the miller belonging to the mill which you can observe from where we are standing, and who happened to be sleeping close to the sluice-gates of this large lake, hurried at the sound of my cries; he threw the cord with which he fastened up his dog towards me, I caught the cord in my hands, he drew me towards him, and I was saved. As for my gun, for which I had a particular affection, which was a dead shot at a distance, and which I was not rich enough to replace, I had merely *to keep my legs* close together, and it was saved with me.

"Let us pursue our road. We will now proceed from the west to the north. That ruin yonder, a fragment of which rears itself aloft like the keep of Vincennes, is the Tower of Vez, the sole remains of a feudal mansion demolished a long time ago. That tower is the spectre, in granite guise, of a past age; it belongs to my friend Paillet. You remember that very considerate lawyer's managing-clerk, who accompanied me, when shooting, from Crépy to Paris, and whose horse, whenever we perceived a gamekeeper approaching us, was good enough to make off with one of the sportsmen, together with his gun, hares, partridges, quails, and everything else, leaving the other sportsman, now converted into an inoffensive tourist, to walk quietly along admiring the country and studying botany.

"That other little château is the Château des Fossés. It was there where my first sensations were awakened; from that place my earliest recollections may be dated. It was at Fossés that I saw my father getting out of the water, from which, with the assistance of Hippolyte, that intelligent negro, who, from fear of the frost, threw away the flowers and carefully housed the pots, had just saved three young fellows who were drowning. One of the three, he whom my father had saved, was called Dupuy—it is the only name I remember. Hippolyte, an admirable swimmer, had saved the other two.

"There, too, lived together Moquet, the *garde-champêtre*, who was such a terrible sufferer from nightmare, and who set a trap upon his chest to catch old Mother Durand; and Peter, the gardener, who with his spade cut snakes in half, from whose bellies live frogs jumped out; and lastly, it was there that old Truff grew older still in majestic repose, a quadruped which had been omitted to be classed by Monsieur de Buffon, a beast, half dog, half bear, upon whose back I used to be placed astride, and who allowed me to take my first lessons in riding.

"And now in the direction of the north-west you may perceive Haramont, a charming village almost lost to sight amid its apple-trees, standing in the centre of a glade of the forest, rendered illustrious by the birth of the good Ange Pitou, the nephew of Aunt Angélique, the pupil of Abbé Fortier, the schoolfellow of young Gilbert, and the companion-at-arms of the Patriot Billot. This honourable distinction, disputed by people who pretend, with some reason perhaps, that Pitou *never existed except in* my own imagination, being the only

one which Haramont can claim, let us continue our route until we reach that double pool on the road leading from Compiègne and on that leading from Vivières, near which I received the hospitality of Boudoux, the day when I fled from the maternal roof, to escape going to the Seminary at Soissons, where I should probably have been killed two or three years afterwards by the explosion of the powder magazine, as was, indeed, the case with some of my young companions.

"Come a little this way towards the middle of that large vista or road cleared through the forest leading in a direction from south to north; half a league behind us is the massive château erected by Francis the First, upon which the conqueror of Marignan and the conqueror of Pavia had affixed the seal of his salamanders; and in front of us, shutting out the horizon, is a lofty mountain covered with furze and ferns. One of the terrible recollections of my youth is connected with this mountain. One winter's night, when the snow had covered this glade over its whole length and width with a white carpet, I observed that I was silently followed, at about twenty paces' distance, by an animal of the size of a large dog, whose eyes shone like two burning coals.

"There was no occasion to look at the animal twice to recognize what it was.

"It was an enormous wolf.

"Ah! if I had had my gun or my rifle, or merely a flint and steel, I should not have cared; but I had not even a pistol, not even a knife, nor yet a common penknife about me.

"Fortunately having been a sportsman during the previous five years, although scarcely numbering fifteen, I knew the habits of the night-prowler with which I had to do, and knew that so long as I remained on my feet and did not run away, I had nothing to fear. But look, my dear child, the mountain is thick set with pitfalls and bogs; I might fall into one of them, and in that case the wolf, with a single bound, would be upon me, and we should then have to see which of the two would have the best claws and the best teeth.

"Although my heart beat violently, I began to sing; I have always sung terribly out of tune; a wolf with the faintest notion of music would have quickly made his escape. My wolf evidently possessed nothing of the kind; the music, on the contrary, seemed to please him, for he took the second in a plaintive and very hungry-sounding howl. I saw no

more, but continued my journey in silence, somewhat resembling those beings who have had their necks wrung in the infernal regions, and whom Dante met in the third circle of hell, walking forwards and looking backwards.

"But I soon perceived that I was committing a very serious imprudence, for, while looking in the direction of the wolf, I did not see where I was going; I stumbled, and the wolf darted forward.

"I was fortunate enough not to fall altogether, but the wolf was hardly more than a dozen paces from me.

"For several moments my legs seemed to be sinking under me; and, in spite of the cold, which was ten degrees below freezing-point, the perspiration rolled off my forehead. I stopped, and the wolf stopped too.

"It was fully five minutes before I recovered my strength; these five minutes, it would seem, appeared long to my companion; he sat down on his haunches, and uttered a second howl, more hungrily-sounding and more plaintive than the former.

"This howl made me shiver to the very marrow of my bones.

"I resumed my journey, now looking most carefully on the ground, stopping every time I wished to see whether the wolf was still following me, or was getting closer to or farther from me.

"The wolf resumed his journey at the same time I did, stopping whenever I stopped, walking when I walked, but still keeping at a distance, and getting a little nearer to me perhaps rather than farther from me.

"At the end of a quarter of an hour he was not more than five paces distant.

"I was now close to the Park; that is to say, I was just then hardly a kilomètre from Villers-Cotterets; but the road was interrupted in this particular spot by a large ditch, that famous ditch across which I had once jumped, in order to give pretty Lawrence an idea of my agility, and on which occasion I was so unfortunate as to split my nankeen trousers, which I had worn for the purpose of making my first communion. I could very easily have jumped across the ditch, and certainly with far greater agility than on the day I have just referred to; but in order to jump across it, I should be obliged to run, and I knew that before I had cleared a fourth of the distance, I should have the wolf on my back.

"*I was consequently* obliged to make a deviation from my

route, and pass through a gate with a turnstile. All that would have been nothing if the gate and the turnstile had not been situated in the shadow projected by the large trees in the park. What might not happen while passing through this shadow? Might not the darkness produce upon the wolf the very opposite effect to that which it produced upon me? It terrified me; would it not embolden the wolf? The greater the darkness, the better the wolf would see.

"There was, however, no hesitation possible in the matter; I plunged into the obscurity; I do not exaggerate when I say that there was not a single hair on my head that was not bathed in perspiration, not a thread of my shirt that was not soaking. As I passed through the turnstile, I cast a glance behind me; the obscurity was so profound, that the form of the wolf had disappeared; nothing more was visible in the darkness of the night than two burning coals.

"No sooner had I passed through than I turned the revolving part of the turnstile round and round; the noise which it made alarmed the wolf, which stopped for a moment, but immediately afterwards it sprang so lightly over the gate, that I did not even hear the noise it made in falling upon the snow, and again it occupied the same distance from me as it had previously done.

"I regained the middle of the walk by the shortest cut.

"I found myself in the light, and I saw again not merely those terrible eyes which seemed to penetrate the darkness with their burning orbs, but even my wolf itself.

"As I approached nearer to the town, and as the animal's instinct warned it that I was about to escape altogether, it drew nearer and nearer to me. It was not more than three paces from me, and yet I neither heard the sound of its footsteps nor its breathing. It seemed like a shadowy, unsubstantial animal, a very spectre of a wolf.

"Nevertheless, I still advanced. I crossed the tennis-court, I entered into what is called the *parterre*, a vast open piece of ground covered with grass, where I no longer had occasion to fear the quagmires. The wolf was so close to me that if I had stopped suddenly, he would have knocked his head against my legs. I would have given anything to have stamped my foot upon the ground, to have clapped my hands together, and have ejaculated a good round ringing oath; but I dared not: could I only have ventured to do so, it would in all probability have taken to its heels, or have retired to a distance, *at all events*, for a little while.

"It took me ten minutes to cross the green sward I have spoken of, and I arrived at the angle of the wall surrounding the château.

"There the wolf stopped; it was hardly more than fifty paces from the town.

"I pursued my way without hastening my pace; the wolf, as it had previously done, sat down on its haunches and looked at me moving away.

"When about a hundred paces distant, the animal uttered a third cry, more famished-sounding and more plaintive than the two others, and which was responded to, as in a single voice, by the fifty hounds belonging to the Duke de Bourbon's pack.

"This final roar was the expression of his regret at not having had an opportunity of fixing his teeth in my flesh; there was no mistake as to its meaning.

"I am not aware whether the beast passed the night where it stopped; but hardly did I feel myself to be in perfect safety than I started off at the top of my speed, and arrived pale and nearly dead in my mother's shop.

"You never knew my poor mother; had you known her, it would be unnecessary for me to tell you that she was far more terrified at my recital than I had been at the actual occurrence itself.

"She undressed me, made me change my shirt, warmed my bed, and saw me into bed as she had done ten years before; she then brought me a bowl of hot wine, the fumes of which ascending to my brain doubled the remorse I felt at not having attempted some valorous feat, like those which had flitted through my brain all the way along, as a means of ridding myself of my enemy.

"And now, my dear boy, allow me, in my character of an intelligent narrator, to pause at this episode; I should not be able to find anything of a more moving nature to tell you. Besides, the preface is as long and even longer than it ought to be. Among the various stories which I have told you a dozen times, choose the one which I am to relate to the public. But make a good choice if you please; if you make a bad selection, it is not upon me alone, but upon yourself also, that the dissatisfaction will fall."

"Well, father, tell us the story of Catherine Blum."

"That is the one you wish for, then?"

"*Yes, it is one of those* I like best of all."

"Very good; in that case let us begin the story you like best of all."

Listen, therefore, my dear readers, to the story of Catherine Blum. The child whom I can refuse nothing, the child with the bright-blue eyes wishes me to tell it you.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAISON-NEUVE OF THE SOISSONS ROAD.

Precisely in the middle of the space situated between the north and east of the forest of Villers-Cotterets, a space which we have omitted to traverse, inasmuch as we commenced our pilgrimage at the château of Villers-Hellon and abandoned it at the mountain of Vivières, the road from Paris to Soissons winds along with the sinuous undulations of a gigantic serpent.

This road—after having already penetrated the forest, which it traverses to the extent of a kilomètre, at Goudreville; after having left the road leading from Crépy on the left; after deviating a little from its course in front of the quarries of Fontaine-eau-Claire; after descending precipitately into the valley of Vauciennes; after having wound its way up on the other side; and after having, in a tolerably straight line, advanced as far as Villers-Cotterets, which it traverses in a kind of obtuse angle—this road, we say, makes its way out at the opposite extremity of the town, and proceeds, at a right angle, to the foot of the mountain of Dampleux, skirts the forest on one side, and on the other the plain in which that beautiful abbey of St. Denis formerly rose, among whose ruins I have so often rambled and played when a child, and which at the time I now write is nothing more than a pretty country house, painted perfectly white, covered with a slate roof, fitted up with green shutters, and almost buried amidst flowers, apple-trees, and the restless foliage of the aspens. The road then boldly enters the forest, through whose dense covert it clears its way until, two leagues and a half farther on, it

again makes its appearance at the posting-place called Vertefeuille.

During this lengthened course only one house exists, and that on the right-hand side of the road; it was built in the time of Philippe-Egalité, as a kind of residence for a head gamekeeper. At that time it was called the Maison-Neuve, or New House; and although it is nearly seventy years since it thrust itself forward like a mushroom at the foot of the gigantic beech and oak-trees which overshadow it, it has, like an old coquette who still insists upon being addressed by her Christian name, preserved the juvenile appellation by which it was at first known.

And why not? The Pont-Neuf, built in 1577, in the reign of Henry III., by the architect Ducerceau, is still called the Pont-Neuf.

Let us return to the Maison-Neuve, the centre of the rapid and simple events which we are about to relate, and make the reader acquainted with it by a detailed description.

The Maison-Neuve is a conspicuous object as you proceed from Villers-Cotterets to Soissons, a little beyond the Stag's Leap, a spot where the road narrows somewhat between two high banks, and which was so called because one day when the duke of Orleans (Philippe-Egalité, of course, for Louis Philippe, as every one knows, was not a sportsman) was hunting, a terrified stag sprang from one side to the other, that is to say, cleared a space of more than thirty feet.

In issuing from this sort of defile, you may perceive, about five hundred paces almost straight before you, the Maison-Neuve, a building two stories high, having a tile roof with small windows inserted therein, and rejoicing in two other windows on the basement story, and two on the first floor.

These windows open upon that side of the house which looks towards the west, that is to say, towards Villers-Cotterets; while the front of the house, facing the north, looks out upon the main road through the door by which you enter the sitting-room on the basement story, and also from the window which belongs to a bedroom on the upper story; this latter window is situated immediately over the door.

At this spot, as at Thermopylæ where there was not sufficient room for a couple of chariots to drive abreast, the roadway is reduced to the width of its paved portion, confined even as that is, on one side by the house itself, on the *other by the garden* belonging to the house, and which, in-

stead of being situated, as is usually the case, behind the building or on either side of it, is situated directly opposite to it.

The house presents a different aspect according to the season of the year.

In the spring, covered with its green vine, as with a green drapery, it basks luxuriously in the sun, looking as if it had quitted the forest to bask by the roadside. Its windows, and particularly one of the windows of the first floor, are filled with wall-flowers, anthemis, cobœa, and volubile, which form almost blinds of verdure, ornamented with flowers of silver, sapphire, and gold. The smoke which issues from the chimney is merely a bluish transparent vapour, hardly leaving its trace in the atmosphere. The two dogs, which sleep in the two compartments of the kennel built on one side of the door, have left the shelter it affords them; one is lying down and sleeping profoundly, with its muzzle stretched out between its paws; the other, which has probably slept sufficiently well during the night, is gravely seated upon its haunches, and sits blinking its eyes in the sun. These two dogs, which belong to the venerable breed of turnspits, a breed which has been honoured by having had my illustrious friend Decamps as its painter in ordinary, are, as a matter of course, male and female; the female is called "Ravaude," and the male "Barbaro."

In summer, the aspect of the house is very different; it looks as if it were fast asleep; its wooden eyelids are shut, and light is thus effectually excluded. Its chimney shows not a single breath of life; the door alone, which faces the north, remains open, so as to command the high road; the two dogs have either retired to their kennel, in the remote depths of which the traveller perceives merely a shapeless mass, or they are stretched close against the wall, seeking there the coolness of the shade or the humidity of the stone.

In autumn the foliage of the vine has assumed a warmer tone; the green drapery of the spring has assumed a deeper and darker hue, like the velvet fruit which they have borne. The windows are half open; but the wall-flowers and the anthemis, the flowers of early spring, have been succeeded by marguerites and chrysanthemums. The chimney again begins to diffuse in the air its white puffs of smoke, and as you pass before the door, you see the fire burning on the hearth, although half-concealed by the saucepan which contains the *pot-au-feu*, and by the stewpan where the rabbit is simmering to perfection.

Ravaude and Barbaro have shaken off their somnolence of the month of April and their sleepiness of the month of July; they are now full of ardour and even of impatience; they drag at their chain, they bark, and howl in plaintive accents; they feel that their period of activity has arrived, that the shooting season has begun, and that they must wage war, and serious war too, against their perpetual enemies, rabbits, foxes, and the wild boars of the neighbourhood.

In winter, the aspect of the house becomes gloomy: the house is cold, and seems to shiver with cold. The green, or the deeper-toned drapery which covered the wall exists no longer; the leaves fall from the vine with that mournful sound which is the invariable accompaniment of falling leaves; its naked tendrils stretch along the wall, like nerves or tendons laid bare. The windows are hermetically closed; not a single flower is left, and nothing is seen but lines of string, like the wires of a harp at rest, along which the now absent convolvulus and cobœas used to climb. An enormous column of dense smoke which makes its escape in widening circles from the chimney, indicates that, wood being one of the perquisites of the keeper, economy is not studied with regard to its consumption. As for Ravaude and Barbaro, all search for them in their empty kennel would be useless; but if by chance the door of the house should happen to be open at the moment the traveller is passing by, and he should cast a look of curiosity into the interior of the house, he would perceive their shadows thrown into grotesque contortions by the flickering fire burning on the broad hearth, from which they would every moment be kicked by the master or mistress of the house, but whither they would obstinately persist in returning in search of a warmth of fifty degrees of temperature which burns their paws and muzzles, and which they make no attempt to avoid, except by turning their heads, in a melancholy manner, to the right or the left, and, with a plaintive cry, raising first one paw and then the other from the ground.

Such was, and such still is, with the exception perhaps of bright and blooming flowers, which almost invariably indicate the presence of some young girl of a tender and susceptible disposition, the Maison-Neuve of the Soissons road, seen from the exterior.

Seen from the interior, the first object which strikes your attention on the ground floor is the large apartment into *which you enter by* the entrance door, furnished with a table,

a sideboard, and half a dozen walnut-wood chairs, the walls ornamented with five or six engravings, representing, according to the different governments which have succeeded each other, either Napoleon, Josephine, Marie-Louise, the King of Rome, the Prince Eugene, and the death of Poniatowski; or the Duke d'Angoulême, the Duchess d'Angoulême, the King Louis XVIII., his brother, and the Duke de Berri; or, lastly, King Louis Philippe, the Queen Maria-Amelia, the Duke d'Orleans, and a group of fair and dark children, composed of the Duke de Nemours, the Prince de Joinville, the Duke d'Aumale, and the Princesses Louise, Clementine, and Marie.

At the present moment I do not know what there is.

Over the fireplace are three double-barrelled guns, suspended against the wall, and drying, in well-greased coverings, from the last rain or the last heavy fog.

Behind the chimney extends a bakehouse, with a small window looking out upon the forest.

Immediately adjoining the eastern aspect of the house is a kitchen, which was added to the main building upon a certain occasion when, the house having been found too small for its inhabitants, it was considered expedient to transform the ancient kitchen into a bed-room.

This same room, formerly the kitchen, is ordinarily used as the bed-chamber of the son of the head keeper for the time being—if there be a son.

On the first floor are two other bed-rooms; that of the master and mistress,—that is to say, of the head keeper himself and his wife, and that of their daughter or their niece—if they happen to have either a daughter or a niece.

Let us add that five or six generations of keepers have succeeded each other in this house, and that it was at the entrance door, and in the room into which you enter immediately upon opening it, that the sanguinary drama, which resulted in the death of the head keeper, Choron, took place in the year 1829, as related in the author's memoirs.

But at the period when the occurrences we are going to relate took place, that is to say, in the earlier days of the month of May, 1829, the Maison-Neuve was inhabited by Guillaume Watrin, head forester or keeper of the district of Chavigny, by Marianne Charlotte Choron his wife, and by Bernard Watrin their son, who was only known under the name of Bernard.

A young girl, the heroine of this story, named Catherine

Blum, had also inhabited this house, but had ceased to reside in it during the previous eighteen months.

We will particularize the causes of the absence and presence, the ages, aspect, and character of the various personages of the story, accordingly as they make their appearance on the scene.

Let us, therefore, go back purely and simply to the period we have previously referred to,—namely, to the 12th of May, 1829.

It is half-past three in the morning; the earliest rays of the approaching day filter through the leaves of the trees, still green with that tender green which lasts only a few weeks; at the faintest breath of wind a shower of dew, which remains trembling at the extremity of the branches, falls upon the high grass like a shower of diamonds.

A young man of three or four and twenty years of age, fair, with bright intelligent eyes, walking along with that regular pace habitual to walkers accustomed to long journeys, dressed in the semi-uniform of the keepers,—that is to say, a blue waistcoat, with a silver oak-leaf worked on the collar, a cap of similar colour and similarly ornamented upon his head, trowsers of ribbed velvet, with large leathern gaiters, and copper buckles, carrying his gun on his shoulder with one hand, and in the other holding a hound in a leash, passed through one of the gaps in the park wall, carefully keeping in the middle of the road, rather from habit than to avoid the dew, which was as heavy as a recent fall of rain, advanced by a side path towards the Maison Neuve on the Soissons road, whose western aspect had been in view for some considerable distance from the other side of the road—that is to say, from that part upon which the four windows look out.

When he had reached the extremity of the path, he saw that the door and windows were closed, an intimation that every member of the Watrin family was still asleep.

"Good!" murmured the young man; "they are taking it very quietly at Guillaume Watrin's! I can understand it as far as the father and mother are concerned; but Bernard —and he in love too! Is it possible a man in love can sleep?"

And crossing the road, he approached closer to the house, with the evident intention of disturbing its slumbering inmates without compunction.

At the sound of his footsteps the two dogs sprang out of their kennel, ready and disposed to bark, as well at the man

as the hound; but they probably recognized a couple of friends, for their mouths opened leisurely, not for a threatening bark, but for a friendly yawn, their tails at the same moment sweeping the ground in apparent glee at the approach of the two new arrivals, who, without positively belonging to the house, did not appear to be altogether strangers to it.

Having reached the threshold, the hound accosted the two dogs in the usual familiar manner among canine acquaintances, while the forester, placing the butt-end of his gun upon the ground, hammered with his fist against the door.

There was no reply to the first summons.

"Hallo, Watrin!" grumbled out the young man, knocking a second time at the door with more energy than the first, "have you grown deaf all of a sudden?" and he listened at the door. "At last," he said, after a moment's pause; "that's lucky."

This phrase of satisfaction was occasioned by a slight noise which he had heard inside the house.

The particular noise, which the distance, and especially the thickness of the door, rendered very indistinct, was the creaking of the staircase under the descending footsteps of the old keeper.

The young man's ear was too practised to be deceived by this sound, and to mistake the footstep of a man of fifty years of age for a youth of five-and-twenty, and so he murmured—

"Ah! it 's old Guillaume:" and then added aloud, "Good day, Guillaume. Open—it is I."

"Ah, ah!" said a voice from the interior, "is that you, François?"

"Who the deuce do you suppose it is likely to be?"

"I'm coming—I'm coming."

"All right! Take your time to slip your breeches on. There's no hurry, although it isn't particularly warm standing here."

And the young man stamped first one foot and then the other against the ground, while the hound sat shivering on his haunches; for the poor beast was as wet with the dew as his master.

At this moment the door opened, and the grey head of the old keeper made its appearance, accompanied, although so early in the morning, with a short pipe.

True it is, the pipe was not lighted. The pipe itself, which, in its first stage, had been a pipe of the ordinary size, and had been subsequently reduced to its present abbreviated

dimensions by a variety of accidents to the stem, never quitted Guillaume Watrin's lips, except during the time which was strictly necessary for its owner to clear out the old ashes and to introduce fresh tobacco, after which it resumed, at the left side of the mouth, between a couple of teeth hollowed out like a pair of pincers, its accustomed place.

There was, however, another occasion when the short cutty-pipe smoked by itself in Guillaume's hand, instead of between his lips; it was whenever his inspector did him the prodigious honour of addressing a remark to him.

Whereupon Guillaume very respectfully took his pipe out of his mouth, drew the sleeve of his coat across his lips, put the hand in which he held the pipe behind his back, and replied.

Guillaume seemed to have been brought up in the school of Pythagoras; for whenever he opened his mouth to ask a question, the question was always asked in the briefest manner; and when he opened his mouth to reply to a question, the answer was invariably made in the concisest form.

We were wrong in saying, "when Guillaume opened his mouth," for Guillaume's mouth never opened, except for the purpose of gaping, even supposing, which is very far from being probable, that he ever gaped.

At other times, Guillaume's jaw hardly ever moved; he was in the habit of holding between his teeth a fragment of a pipe, the stem of which very frequently was not more than a couple of inches long, the consequence of which was a hissing sound, not unlike that of a serpent, for his words were obliged to make their escape through the separation of the two jaws, a separation produced simply by the thickness of the stem of the pipe, and scarcely wide enough to enable a five-franc piece to be thrust through it.

Whenever Guillaume's pipe left his mouth, whether for the purpose of giving its master an opportunity of emptying it or to enable him to fill it again, or whether to afford him the means of answering the questions addressed to him by any person of high standing, the words, instead of flowing more easily, became more shrill, and the hissing sound, instead of diminishing, increased: the reason of this was obvious; for as the stem of the pipe was no longer there to keep the jaws open, the teeth of the upper jaw rested upon those of the lower jaw with all their accustomed weight, in *which case it was a* most fortunate circumstance for any one

who could manage to understand what Guillaume was talking about.

This culminating point in Guillaume's physiognomy being established, let us finish his portrait.

He was, we have already observed, a man of fifty years of age, a little above the middle height, upright and stiff, with a scanty crop of grey hair, thick eyebrows, his face completely encircled by his whiskers, piercingly-bright small eyes, a long nose, a good-humoured mouth, and a pointed chin. Without having the appearance of listening or seeing, his eye was always on the look-out, and he both saw and heard in a marvellous manner, whether it was what was passing between his wife, his son, and his niece, or what was passing among his partridges, rabbits, hares, foxes, polecats, and weasels, animals which, from the beginning of the world, have been engaged among each other in a warfare as obstinate and bloodthirsty as was the case, from the year 774 to the year 370 before Christ, between the inhabitants of Messina and Sparta.

Watrin had the deepest veneration for my father, and loved me exceedingly. He had preserved under a glass shade the tumbler out of which General Dumas was in the habit of drinking when he went out shooting with him, and out of which glass, ten, fifteen, and twenty years afterwards, he invariably insisted upon my drinking whenever we two went out shooting together.

Such was the man who, pipe in mouth, passed his head, with its good-humoured bantering expression of face, through the opening of the door of the Maison-Neuve on the Soissons road, to welcome, at four o'clock in the morning, the young man whom he had addressed by the name of François, and who complained of not feeling over warm, although they had entered one month and twenty days into what Mathieu Laensberg styled that delightful period of the year called spring.

Seeing who it was, Guillaume Watrin threw the door wide open and the young man entered.

## CHAPTER III.

### MATHIEU GOGUELUE.

FRANCOIS walked straight up to the fire-place, placed his gun in the corner, while the hound, which answered to the characteristic name of *Louchonneau*, or little squint-eye, proceeded to take its seat very unceremoniously upon the cinders, which were still warm from the fire of the preceding evening.

The reason of the hound having had the name of Louchonneau conferred upon it was, that a small knot of red hair, growing at the corner of the eye-lid, had given it, if not a permanent, at least an occasional squint.

Louchonneau enjoyed the reputation, within a circuit of three leagues, of being the best hound in Villers-Cotterets.

Although still very young to have attracted any note in the great art of hunting, François, on his side, was looked upon as one of the cleverest young men for a great distance round in following up a trail.

Whenever there was any shot to be verified, or a wild boar to track, it was always François who was entrusted with this peculiarly difficult task.

For him, the forest however dark had no mysteries; a broken blade of grass, a leaf turned back, a few hairs hanging on a thorny bush, revealed, from the opening to the concluding scene, a nocturnal drama, which may have imagined it had no other theatre than the green turf, no other witnesses than the trees, no other lights than the stars.

As the fête of Corcy would take place on the following Sunday, the foresters or keepers belonging to the various districts surrounding this lovely village had received from M. Deviolaine, the inspector, permission to kill a wild boar for the occasion, and in order to ensure this wild boar from making its escape, François was entrusted with the care of tracking it to its lair.

He had just performed this task with his usual conscientiousness, when we met him in the path leading out of the forest, followed him to Guillaume's door, and heard him say to the latter, as he stood stamping his feet on the ground:

"*Take your* time to slip your breeches on."

"What!" replied Guillaume, when François had placed his gun by the corner of the fire-place, and when Louchonneau had taken his seat upon the ashes: "not warm! and in the month of May too? What would you have said if you had gone through the campaign in Russia, you chilly fellow?"

"Wait a moment! when I say, *not warm*, you understand that it is only a way of speaking, after all. I said the nights are not warm. You must have found out that the nights don't pass away as quickly as the days do, probably because we don't see clearly; during the day we are in the month of May, but at night we are still in February; so I don't intend to retract what I said, that it isn't particularly warm, after all."

Guillaume stopped striking a light with his flint and steel, and looking at François out of the corner of his eye, as Louchonneau was in the habit of doing, said:

"Well, boy, shall I tell you something?"

"Say on, Guillaume," replied François, looking in his turn at the old head keeper, with that quiet, bantering air so peculiar to the peasants of Picardy and their neighbours of the Ile-de-France—"say on, Guillaume, you speak so nicely when you're inclined to talk."

"Well, then, you imitate the donkey for the sake of its braying."

"I don't understand you?"

"You don't understand me?"

"No, upon my word I don't."

"You say you are cold, in order that I may offer you a dram."

"I never thought of it, I give you my word. I don't mean to say, that if you were to offer me such a thing I should refuse; no! no! I know the respect I owe you too well for that."

And with his head still on one side, he cast a droll look at Watrin, which the latter seemed perfectly to understand; for, without making any other answer than a *hum!* which indicated his doubts with regard to the disinterestedness and respect which François professed, he made no attempt to relax his efforts to strike a light with the flint and steel. At the third trial the tinder took fire; Guillaume, with one of his fingers, apparently quite insensible to the heat, placed the tinder upon the bowl of the pipe, which he had filled with tobacco, and began to inhale the smoke; at first

puffing it out in an almost imperceptible vapour, soon succeeded by wreaths of thick smoke, which gradually became thicker and thicker, until, thinking probably that his pipe was sufficiently lighted, and, no longer having any fear of its going out, he went on smoking in his usual calm and methodical manner.

While engaged in this serious occupation, the features of the worthy head keeper had expressed an unfeigned and deep-seated preoccupation; but as soon as the operation had been attended with success, the smile returned to his face, and, advancing towards the sideboard, from which he took out a bottle and a couple of glasses, he said:—

"Well, be it so; we will first say a word to this bottle of cognac, and then talk over our little affairs together."

"A word! is he so stingy in his conversation, Guillaume?"

As if to give a formal contradiction to François's remark, Guillaume filled the two glasses to the very brim, and then putting his own glass close to that of the young man, said:—

"Your health."

"And yours! and your wife's, too! and may Heaven be graciously pleased to make her a little less obstinate."

"Good," said Guillaume, with a grimace which was intended for a smile.

And taking hold of his short pipe with his left hand, and then passing it behind his back in his usual manner, he carried his glass to his mouth with his right hand, and emptied it without drawing breath.

"Wait a minute," said François, laughing, "I haven't finished, and we shall be obliged to begin over again. Here is your son Monsieur Bernard's health."

And in his turn he emptied his glass, apparently, however, deriving a greater amount of enjoyment and relish from it than the old keeper had done.

At the last drop, however, he struck his foot on the ground, as if in despair.

"There now," he said, "if I haven't forgotten some one!"

"Whom have you forgotten?" asked Guillaume, puffing away very vigorously at his pipe, which, during the voyage it had undertaken, had almost gone out.

"Whom have I forgotten, do you say?" exclaimed François, "why, Mademoiselle Catherine, your niece, of course. Ah! it isn't right to forget the absent; but the fact is, my glass *is quite empty; look*, Guillaume."

And, pouring out the last drop of the spirit upon his thumbnail, he said:—

"Look at the topaz upon my nail."

Guillaume made a grimace, which signified: "You young rascal, I know what you are after; but I'll excuse it for the sake of the cause."

Guillaume was very chary of his words, as we have observed; but in return he had pushed the science of pantomime to its extremest limit.

For, with another grimace, intended for a smile, he took hold of the bottle, and poured out the contents in such a manner that the glass overflowed into the saucer.

"There!" said François, "there is no stinginess this time in old Guillaume! It shows how he loves his pretty little niece."

And then carrying the glass to his lips with an enthusiasm which was divided in equal proportions between the young girl and the liqueur, he said:—

"Ah! who wouldn't love her, dear Mademoiselle Catherine? It is like one's weakness for cognac, you can't help yourself."

And this time, following the example which Guillaume had set him, he emptied his glass at a draught.

The old keeper performed the same movement and the same action with military precision; only each expressed in a different manner the satisfaction he felt as the liqueur passed down his throat.

"Hum!" said the one.

"Ha!" said the other.

"Are you still cold?" asked Guillaume.

"No," said François; "on the contrary, I am quite warm."

"So that you feel better?"

"I should think so, indeed; I am like your barometer, at set fair."

"In that case," said Father Guillaume, striking into the matter which neither of them had as yet touched, "we can now talk a little about the boar."

"Ah! the boar," said François, winking at his companion, "I think we have got him this time fast enough."

"Yes, like the last time, I suppose," said a shrill jeering voice, which, sounding suddenly behind the two keepers, made them start.

They both turned round at the same moment and with the same movement, although they had perfectly well recognized the individual to whom the voice belonged.

The latter, however, with the manners of one familiar with the usages of the house, passed behind the two keepers, contenting himself by adding to the few words he had already said,

"Good morning, Monsieur Guillaume, and good morning to the company, too."

And he went and sat down near the fireplace, the embers of which he soon revived by throwing a handful of wood upon them, which caught fire as soon as he applied a match to it.

Then taking three or four potatoes out of his pocket, he buried them side by side in the ashes, which he heaped over and round them with a precaution which denoted his gastronomical predilections.

The individual who had arrived precisely in time to interrupt, at the very first phrase, the recital which François was on the point of beginning, deserves, from the part which he will play in this story, that an attempt should be made to sketch his portrait, physically and morally.

He was a young fellow of from twenty to two-and-twenty years of age, with red, straight hair, a low forehead, a lowering glance, a snub nose, a projecting mouth, a receding chin, and a dirty scanty beard. His neck, scarcely hidden by the torn collar of his shirt, showed that kind of wen so common in the Valais, but which happily is so rarely met with in our country, and which is termed a goître. His arms, awkwardly hung, seemed disproportionately long, and gave to his slow and in some respects indolent walk the peculiar gait familiar to those large monkeys which Monsieur Geoffroy Saint Hilaire, the celebrated naturalist, has described, I believe, under the name of chimpanzees. Seated upon his haunches, or upon a stool, the resemblance between the misshapen man and the properly-formed monkey became more striking than ever; for in such a position, he could, with the assistance of his hands or his feet, pick up from the ground, or draw close to him, and that almost without a movement of his body, which was cast in as indifferent a mould as the rest of his frame, the various objects he required. Lastly, this ill-formed, ill-fashioned body was supported by feet, which might have rivalled, in length, and breadth, and general size, those of Charlemagne, and which, for want of a name, might have supplied the standard of that measure, which, after and since the illustrious chief of the Carlovingian *race, has been known as a king's foot.*

As far as moral qualifications were concerned, that share of favours which nature had apportioned to the poor devil was still more limited than were his physical acquirements. The very contrary to those rough and dirty-looking scabbards which sometimes contain a beautiful and good rapier, the body of Mathieu Goguelue, for that was the name of the person we are at present describing, contained an evil disposition. Was it naturally so, or had he tried to make others suffer because others made him suffer? This is a question which we leave to be argued and decided by those wiser and better informed than we are with regard to that philosophical proposition of the reaction of matter upon mind. At all events, however, there was not a living being weaker than Mathieu that did not utter a cry as soon as Mathieu touched it; the bird, because he plucked out its feathers; the dog, because he trod upon its foot; the child, because he pulled its hair. On the other hand, with those stronger than himself, Mathieu, although he never dropped his jeering tone in addressing them, was humble and servile; if he received an insult, an outrage, a blow, however gross the insult, however excessive the outrage, however violent the blow, however bitter the moral or physical pain it provoked, Mathieu's face continued, with its stupid, vacant grin, unchanged; but injury, outrage, blow, were all registered at the bottom of Mathieu's heart in indelible characters; sooner or later, without any one being able to guess whence the evil proceeded, the evil was rendered back a hundredfold, and Mathieu, in the very inmost recesses of his conscience, enjoyed a moment of dark and guilty delight, which made him not unfrequently inwardly rejoice at the evil others had wrought him on account of the satisfaction he derived from the mischief he wrought others.

It must, however, be admitted, in extenuation of this evil temper of his mind, that his life had always been one of a precarious and wretched nature. One day he was seen leaving a kind of ravine, where, in all probability, some of those wandering Bohemians who pass through the huge trackless forests had abandoned him to his fate. He was then three years old, half naked, and scarcely able to speak. The peasant who first saw him was named Mathieu, the ravine out of which he came was called Goguelue; and the name of Mathieu Goguelue was accordingly given to the child. As for baptizing him, the idea never entered any one's head, and Mathieu had not been able to say whether he

had been baptized or not. Besides, who was likely to care about the child's soul when the body was in so miserable a condition that it could only be supported by charity and theft?

In this way he managed to reach the age of manhood. Although ill-formed, and very ugly, Mathieu was strong and vigorous; although a dull-brained, stupid-looking fellow in appearance, Mathieu was full of craft and cunning. If he had been born in Oceania, upon the banks of the Senegal, or in the Japanese waters, the savage might have said of him what they say of the monkeys, "They won't speak, because they are afraid of being taken for men and made to work."

Mathieu pretended to be very weak; Mathieu feigned a half-witted, idiotic manner; but if any opportunity presented itself wherein he was called upon to exhibit his strength, or to bring his intelligence into play, Mathieu thereupon showed either the tremendous strength of the bear, or the profound cunning of the fox; but no sooner had the danger passed away, or the desire was satisfied, than Mathieu again became Mathieu, everybody's Mathieu, the well-known, jeered at, harmless, idiotic Mathieu.

The Abbé Grégoire, that excellent man, whom I have spoken of in my "Memoirs," and who will be called upon to play a part in this book, had taken pity upon the wretched mental organization of this poor lad; regarding himself as the natural guardian of the miserable orphan, his wish had been to advance him a degree in the natural order of beings, and, out of this kind of polypus, to make an animal; the consequence of which had been, that for a whole year he had wearied his body and mind in endeavouring to teach the boy reading and writing. At the end of a year Mathieu had left the worthy priest's hands with the reputation of a dull-headed, half-witted fellow. The common opinion, in other words that of Mathieu's fellow-pupils, and the individual opinion, in other words that of the master, was, that Mathieu did not know an O when he saw it, and had no idea how to make the letter I; but his schoolfellows and his teacher were mistaken; both private and public opinion were in the wrong. Mathieu could not read like Monsieur de Fontanes, who passed for the best reader of his age; but Mathieu could read, and could read with tolerable fluency, too. Mathieu did not write like Monsieur Prudhomme, the pupil of Brard and of Saint Omer; but Mathieu could write, and could write in such a way as to be tolerably legible. Only, no one had ever *seen Mathieu* read or write.

Guillaume Watrin had on his side attempted to draw Mathieu out of his physical degradation, actuated by the same feeling which had induced the Abbé Grégoire to seek to withdraw him from his moral degradation,—that is to say, by that tender compassion for one's fellow-creatures and that instinctive dignity for oneself which exists in all hearts. He had observed in Mathieu a certain aptitude for imitating the songs of birds, for mimicking the cries of wild beasts, for following up a track; he had remarked that, although Mathieu squinted, he saw a rabbit or a hare on her form as well as any one; he had perceived more than once that there was no powder in his flask and no shot in his belt, and the conclusion he drew was, that as it is not absolutely necessary to be fashioned precisely after the model of Apollo or that of Antinous in order to become a good keeper, he might perhaps succeed in putting such qualifications as Mathieu did possess to a good profit, and in making him a tolerable under-keeper. With this object he had spoken of Mathieu to Monsieur Deviolaine, who had authorized Guillaume to put a gun in the hands of his *protégé*. The gun had accordingly been put in Mathieu's hands; but at the expiration of six months' exercise in his new apprenticeship, Mathieu had killed two dogs and wounded one of the beaters without ever having brought down a single head of game. Whereupon Guillaume, convinced that while Mathieu possessed all the instincts of a poacher, he had none of the qualities of a keeper, took away the gun which he had used so awkwardly, and Mathieu, insensible to this affront, which, however, closed the brilliant prospect that had been revealed to him for a moment, and would have dazzled eyes ess indifferent or less philosophical than his own, had resumed, without a feeling of shame, his usual life of idleness and pilfering.

In this wandering existence, the new house on the Soissons road and Guillaume Watrin's fireside were among his favourite halting-places, in spite of the profound dislike, or rather instinctive aversion, which Madeleine entertained towards him, for she was too careful a housekeeper not to observe how her garden and her larder suffered from Mathieu Goguelue's presence; her aversion was shared by Bernard, whom as yet we only know by the toast which François proposed in his honour, and who seemed to divine the fatal influence which this vagrant guest of his own fireside would one day have over his destiny.

We have forgotten, moreover, to state that even as no one was aware of the secret progress which Mathieu had been making in reading and writing during the time he had been with the good Abbé Grégoire, so no one had any suspicion that this awkwardness or want of skill was entirely assumed, and that, on the contrary, when Mathieu was in the humour, he could bring down his pheasant or arrest the course of a wild boar with as deadly an aim as any of the sportsmen in the forest.

It may be asked, how was it, or why was it, that Mathieu hid his talents from the knowledge of his companions and from public admiration? The reason was this, that Mathieu had thought that it might be not only useful to know how to read, write, and shoot, but perhaps still more useful, in certain cases, if he were thought to be awkward and ignorant in such matters.

As may be seen, there is nothing much to be said in favour of the person who, entering just as François was beginning his recital, had interrupted it by those incredulous words, uttered with reference to the wild boar which the young keeper imagined he had already fast hold of:

"Yes, like the last time."

"Ah! the last time," replied François; "well! we will talk about that presently."

"And where is the boar?" asked Guillaume, as the necessity of refilling his pipe left his tongue at liberty for a moment.

"He is in the salt-tub, since François has got hold of him," said Mathieu.

"No, not yet," replied François; "but before Madame Watrin's cuckoo strikes seven o'clock it will be. Won't it, Louchonneau?"

The dog, which had been plunged into a state of visible beatitude by the warmth of the fire which Mathieu had rekindled, turned round at his master's appeal, and as he swept the ashes of the hearth with his long tail, uttered a little friendly growl, which seemed to give an affirmative reply to the question his master had addressed to him.

Satisfied with Louchonneau's answer, François turned his eyes away from Mathieu Goguelue with a marked dislike, which he did not even take the trouble to disguise, and resumed his conversation with Guillaume, who, delighted at having a fresh pipe to enjoy, prepared himself to listen to his young companion with complaisance and serenity.

"*I was saying,* Guillaume," resumed François, "that the *animal is not more* than a quarter of a league from this place,

in the thicket which you know is called the Têtes de Salmon, near Mentart's field. The brute started about half-past two in the morning from the thicket on the Dampleux road.

"Good!" interrupted Goguelue; "how do you know that, since you didn't leave till three o'clock?"

"Ah, Guillaume! there's a severe critic! he asks how I know that. I will tell you, Louchonneau, my friend, for it may be of service to you some day."

François had one bad habit, which offended Mathieu mightily; it was to apply, without distinction, the name of Louchonneau to the individual and to the animal, fancying that, both being affected by the same infirmity—although, in his opinion, the hound squinted in a very far less disagreeable manner than the individual—the same name might serve to designate equally the biped and the quadruped.

The remark appeared, at first sight, to be as indifferent to the one as to the other; but in the manifestation of that indifference it must be observed that the dog alone was sincere.

François, not for a moment suspecting that he had just increased by an additional cause of complaint the old grudges and bitter feelings which were being stored up in Mathieu's heart against him, accordingly went on:

"What time does the dew fall?" asked the young keeper. "At three o'clock in the morning, doesn't it? Well, then, if he had started after the dew had fallen, he would have trodden on the damp ground, and there wouldn't have been any water in his foot-tracks; while the fact was, that he walked on the dry ground. The dew fell immediately afterwards, and it has made some little drinking-troughs for the red-breasts all along the road; and that is why!"

"How old is the beast?" asked Guillaume, considering either that Mathieu's observation was only a very ordinary one, or that, after the explanation François had given, Mathieu ought to be sufficiently enlightened.

"Six or seven years," replied François, unhesitatingly.

"That's good again," said Mathieu; "I suppose now he has shown you his baptismal certificate."

"Well, so he has, and signed it with his own paw. It's not everybody, perhaps, could do as much! and unless he has some motive for concealing his age, I will warrant that he doesn't deceive me within three months. Isn't it so, Louchonneau? Look there, Guillaume, Louchonneau says that I'm quite right."

"Is he alone?" asked Guillaume.

"No; he is with the sow, which is in litter."

"Ah, ah!"

"And nearly ready to whelp!"

"I suppose you've acted man-midwife to wild boars?" said Mathieu, seemingly unable to let François continue his story without interruption.

"What a clever question! Would you believe, Guillaume, that a fellow who has been picked up in the midst of a forest doesn't know when a wild sow is full or not? Why, what did you learn at school? Since she walks heavily, stupid fellow, since her claws spread out as she walks along, as if she were going to break into pieces, it is because the poor beast's belly is heavy."

"Is it a new animal down here?" observed Guillaume, desirous of ascertaining whether the number of wild boars in the district over which he was keeper increased, diminished, or remained in the same state.

"The wild sow—yes!" replied François, with his usual positiveness; "the boar—no! I have never seen her before; but him I know right well; and that is why I told you a little while ago, just as that bird of ill omen there, Goguelue, I mean, entered, that I was going after an old acquaintance in following up this wild boar. He is the very same into whose shoulder I sent a ball a fortnight ago, close by the Yvors copse."

"And what makes you believe it to be the same?"

"Do *you* ask such a question as that—an old hound like you, who could afford to give a few points to Louchonneau? Do you hear that—Louchonneau? It is Guillaume who asks such a question as that. Good—I knew very well that I had hit him; only, instead of sending the ball into the shoulder-joint, I sent it into the shoulder itself."

"Hum!" said Guillaume, shaking his head. "He didn't bleed?"

"No; because the ball remained between the skin and the flesh, in the fat. By this time, you see, the wound is in a fair way of healing; it itches and teazes the poor brute so, that he rubbed himself against the third oak to the left of the well down by Sarrazins yonder. He rubbed, and rubbed himself so hard, that he has left a tuft of hair on the bark of the tree. Here it is."

And François took out of his waistcoat-pocket a tuft of hair which, still wet with cold clotted blood, he produced in *support of his assertion.*

Guillaume took hold of the tuft of hair, cast the glance of a connoisseur upon it, and returning it to François as if it had been the most precious possession in the world, said,—

"Yes, indeed, he's there still, my boy, sure enough; it's exactly as if I saw him."

"Ah! you'll see him better still when we have given him his bellyful."

"You make my mouth water. I have a good mind to take a quiet stroll down there, to have a look at him."

"Go, go; I am quite easy, you will find everything just as I have told you. As for him, he has his den in the old thorn by the Têtes de Salmon. Don't stand upon ceremony with the gentleman; go as close as you like to him, *he* won't stir; his wife is not well, and her good man is very gallant."

"Well, go then I will," said Guillaume with a determined air, which made him set his teeth close together, thereby shortening still more the stem of his already short pipe.

"Will you take Louchonneau?"

"What for?"

"True, you have your eyes about you, and won't need him; so I shall take Master Mathieu's namesake to his kennel, when he has had the patriotic gift of a piece of bread conferred upon him, which he well deserves considering that he has worked this morning like an old darling dog, as he is."

"Do you hear?" said Guillaume, looking somewhat ruefully at Mathieu, who was quietly eating his potatoes by the fireside; "if I ask him about a squirrel, he can tell me which tree it ran up, if about a weazel, what part of the road it crossed, and that is what you could never do."

"And what I should never think of bothering myself about. What good would it do me?"

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders at Mathieu's indifference, which the old keeper could not comprehend, and then leisurely putting on his coat, fastened on his gaiters, took his gun in his hand, partly from habit, and also because he would hardly have known what to do with his right arm if he had not had his gun with him, gave François a friendly shake of the hand, and set off.

The latter, faithful to the promise which he had just made Louchonneau, but still looking after the old keeper, who took the road leading to the Têtes du Salmon, went straight to the

cupboard, opened it, and cut off a piece of black bread about half a pound weight, as he muttered—

"What a brave fellow it is! while I was telling him all about it, he could hardly keep his feet quiet. Here, Louchonneau, my boy, here's a nice crust for you. And now, since we have worked hard, we will go off to bed, and glad enough to do so, too."

And, in his turn, quitting the room by the door of the bakehouse, at the back of which was Master Louchonneau's kennel, he disappeared, followed by his dog, for whom the crust of bread seemed to soften the unpleasantness of having to return to his kennel, and left Mathieu Goguelue alone with his potatoes, without bestowing another thought upon him.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BIRD OF ILL-OMEN.

Scarcely was François out of his sight, than Mathieu raised his head, and an expression of intelligence, of which it almost seemed his heavy countenance was incapable, passed like a flash of lightning across his face.

Listening to the sound of the young keeper's footsteps dying away, and to the sound of his voice growing gradually more and more indistinct, he advanced on tiptoe stealthily towards the bottle of brandy, looking, which the cast in his eyes enabled him to do, with one eye at the door by which Guillaume had left the house, and with the other at that by which François had just disappeared.

He next lifted up the bottle, and placed it in the ray of light which crossed the room like a golden arrow, in order to ascertain what quantity was left, and consequently what quantity he might absorb without too great a chance of detection.

"Ah! the old skinflint!" he said; "when I think that he never offered me any."

And in order to repair Father Guillaume's forgetfulness, *Mathieu put the neck* of the bottle to his lips and swallowed

three or four mouthfuls of the ardent spirit, as if it had been the very mildest drink, and that, too, without giving utterance to the "*Hum*" of Guillaume, or to the "*Ha*" of François.

And then, as he heard the latter's footsteps approaching, Mathieu, with the same rapid and stealthy tread, resumed his place on the stool in the chimney corner, and began to sing, with an air of innocence which was capable of deceiving even François himself, a song, of which a regiment of dragoons who had been quartered a long time at the Château of Villers-Cotterets, had left the tradition in the town.

Mathieu had just finished the first verse of his song, when François reappeared at the bake-house door.

Possibly, as if to show how little interest he took in the presence or absence of François, Mathieu Goguelue was about to proceed with the interminable romance, and begin the second verse; but François, standing before him, said,—

"Well, you seem to be singing now."

"Is singing prohibited?" asked Mathieu. "In that case, the mayor had better make the prohibition public, and then one won't sing any more."

"No," replied François, "it isn't prohibited, but it will bring me bad luck."

"Why so?"

"Because when the first bird I hear sing in the morning is an owl, I always say the affair is sure to turn out badly."

"You mean to say, I suppose, that I am an owl? Just as you please, I am anything any one likes."

And putting both his hands together, after he had first taken the indispensable precaution to spit in them, Mathieu Goguelue imitated so successfully the mournful and monotonous hooting of the bird of night, that François himself could not help starting.

"Will you hold your noise, you bird of ill-omen, you?" he said.

"Hold my tongue?"

"Yes."

"And suppose I have something to sing to you, what will you say, then?"

"I shall say that I have not time to listen to you. Come, do me a kindness instead."

"You?"

"Yes, me. Do you suppose that you can't do a kindness to any one?"

"Yes, but what is it you want?"

"I want you to hold my gun before the fire to dry, while I go and change my gaiters."

"Oh! change your gaiters! So Monsieur François is afraid of catching cold."

"I am not afraid of catching cold, but I am going to put on the regulation gaiters, since the inspector might come to the hunt, and I should not like him to find me otherwise than properly dressed. Well, it don't seem you care to dry my gun?"

"Not yours, any more than anybody else's. I give you leave to pound my head between a couple of stones, like a vermin, if I ever touch a gun again until I am carried to my grave."

"Well, and no loss either, considering the manner in which you use it," said François, opening a cupboard, which contained a collection of gaiters of all kinds, and looking for his own gaiters among those belonging to the Watrin family.

Mathieu watched him with his left eye, while his right eye seemed exclusively occupied with the last potato, which he peeled slowly and awkwardly, and then grumbled out, still observing him attentively,—

"Well, and why should I use the gun any better, when it is only for others that I am required to use it? Let an opportunity only occur for using it on my own account, and you will see whether I am more awkward at it than you are."

"And what will you handle then, if it isn't a gun?" asked François, with his foot upon a chair, and beginning to button his gaiters.

"I shall handle my wages instead! Monsieur Watrin proposed to get me made a supernumerary keeper; but as a man must serve his Highness, one, two and sometimes even three years for nothing, why, I'm very much obliged to you, but I give it up. I prefer to enter the mayor's service as a servant."

"What! a servant of the mayor? a servant to Monsieur Raisin, the timber-merchant?"

"Yes, Monsieur Raisin, the timber-merchant or the mayor, whichever you like, it's all the same."

"Good!" said François, continuing to buckle his gaiters, but with a movement of the shoulders which indicated the contempt he felt for a domestic servant.

"You don't like it?"

"*If*" *replied* François; "it's all the same to me. The only

thing I should like to know is, what is going to be done with old Pierre."

"Why," said Mathieu, indifferently, "he's going away."

"Going away?" repeated François, with a slight expression of interest in the tone of his voice for the old servant referred to.

"Certainly; since I am to take his place, he goes away as a matter of course," continued Mathieu.

"It's not possible!" resumed François; "he has been twenty years in Raisin's house."

"An additional reason why it should be somebody else's turn now," said Mathieu with a sneer.

"You're a thorough scoundrel, Louchonneau," exclaimed François.

"In the first place," replied Mathieu, with that half-silly expression which he knew so well how to assume, "my name is not Louchonneau; it is the dog you have just taken to his kennel that is called Louchonneau, and not I."

"Yes, you're right," said François; "and when he learnt that people sometimes gave you the same name as his, he protested against it, poor beast! saying that he, who is Father Watrin's hound, would scorn to take the place of Monsieur Deviolaine's hound, although the house of an inspector is naturally better than that of a head-keeper; and ever since his protest—although you squint still, it is true,—people don't call you Louchonneau any longer."

"There now! so, in your opinion, I'm a thorough scoundrel, eh, François?"

"Not only do *I* think so, but everybody else, too."

"Why so?"

"Are you not ashamed of taking the bread out of the mouth of an old man like Pierre? What will he be able to do without a place! He will be obliged to beg, for the sake of his wife and two children."

"In that case you will make him an allowance out of the five hundred francs a year which you receive as under-keeper."

"I shall not make him an allowance," replied François, "because, with those five hundred francs, I support my mother, and she, poor good creature, before every one; but he will always find at my house, whenever he likes to come there, a basin of onion soup and some stewed rabbit, which is a keeper's ordinary fare. Servant at the mayor's!" continued François, who had finished buttoning his second

gaiter; "how like you that is to make a servant of yourself."

"Bah! one livery is just the same as another," said Mathieu; "and I prefer that which has money in its pockets to that which has its pockets empty."

"Wait a minute, my friend," cried François; but he added immediately afterwards, "no, I make a mistake; you're no friend of mine; you must know that our coat is not a livery, it is a uniform."

"An oak leaf embroidered on the collar and a piece of lace stitched on to the shoulder are deucedly like one another," said Mathieu, with a movement of the head, which proved, by gesture as well as by words, the little difference he made between the two.

"True," resumed François, who had no intention to let his companion have the last word; "only with this difference, that with the oak leaf on the collar, a man works, don't he? while with the lace on his shoulder, he idles about and does nothing. It is that which has made you prefer the lace to the oak leaf, I suppose; eh! lazy bones?"

"As likely as not," replied Mathieu.

Then, all at once, passing from one idea to another, as if something fresh had suddenly occurred to him,—

"By the bye," he said, "I hear that Catherine returns to-day from Paris."

"Who or what do you mean by Catherine?" asked François.

"Why," said Mathieu, "Catherine is Catherine,—old Guillaume's niece,—Monsieur Bernard's cousin,—who has just finished her apprenticeship as a dress-maker, at Paris, and is going to take the shop of Mademoiselle Rigolot, in the Place de la Fontaine, at Villers-Cotterets."

"Well, what then?" asked François.

"Why, if she is coming back to day, I shall not go away until to-morrow; for I dare say there will be all sorts of gay doings here, to welcome this mirror of virtue home."

"Listen, Mathieu," said François, with a more serious air than he had hitherto adopted; "for myself, it don't so much matter; but when you talk before others, in this house, of Mademoiselle Catherine, you must take care whom you are talking to."

"Why so?"

"Why, because Mademoiselle Catherine is the daughter of *Monsieur Guillaume* Watrin's own sister."

"Yes; and the sweetheart of Monsieur Bernard as well, you mean?"

"As for that, if you are asked anything about it, Mathieu," returned François, "I advise you to say that you know nothing, you see."

"Well, you are wrong there; I shall say what I know. People see what they see, and hear what they hear."

"Well," said François, looking at Mathieu with an expression of disgust and contempt so thoroughly mingled, that it was impossible to decide which of the two feelings was the stronger, "you were perfectly right to become a lacquey; it's your trade, Mathieu, spy and tale-bearer. You have a good chance of getting on in your new occupation. When Bernard comes down, tell him I shall be waiting for him a hundred paces from here, at the rendezvous,—that is, at the Stag's Leap. Do you hear?"

And throwing his gun across his shoulder, with that movement which belongs only to those who have a perfect familiarity with the use of that weapon, he left the house, repeating,—

"I say it once more, Mathieu, you're a thorough scoundrel and a bad-hearted fellow."

Mathieu looked at him, as he strode away, with his never-changing smile; but no sooner had the young keeper disappeared, than that same look of intelligence we have before remarked, again passed across his face, and, in a voice full of deep menace, which grew louder and louder, as the object of his abuse moved out of sight, he said,—

"Ah! you say it once more, do you? I am a bad-hearted fellow, am I? And a bad shot, too? And Bernard's dog protested against my being called Louchonneau, like him, did he? And I'm a spy, a lazy hound, and a tale-bearer. Patience! patience! patience! the world is not coming to an end just yet, and perhaps I shall have time to pay off my debts before the end of the world."

At this moment, the staircase which led to the first floor was heard to creak, a door opened, and a handsome and vigorous-looking young man of five and twenty years of age, completely equipped in his shooting suit, with the exception of his gun, appeared on the threshold.

The costume of the young keeper was irreproachable; his blue coat with silver buttons, fastened from the top to the bottom, did full justice to his fine figure; tight velveteen trowsers, and leathern gaiters, fastening above the knee,

set off his limbs, which were a perfect model of symmetry and strength; and lastly, fair hair, and whiskers a little lighter than his hair, harmonized admirably with his face, which the air and the sun had not succeeded in robbing of its youthful freshness.

There was something so profoundly sympathetic in the person we have just introduced upon the scene, that, notwithstanding the resolution of character shown by his light-blue eye, and the sharp curve of his chin, the sure indication of a strong will, carried even to obstinacy, it was impossible not to feel irresistibly drawn towards him.

But Mathieu was not one of those men who allow themselves to be carried away by any kind of impulse or sympathetic feeling. The physical beauty of Bernard, which formed so complete a contrast with his own ugliness, had been an invariable source of envy and hatred with Mathieu; and, assuredly, if he had only to wish that some misfortune might alight upon himself so that a misfortune of double the same weight might befall Bernard, he would not have hesitated wishing that he might lose one of his own eyes, if Bernard could only lose both his, or breaking one of his own legs, provided Bernard could only manage to break both of his.

This feeling was so powerful with him, that whatever effort he might make to smile upon Bernard, he never could succeed in smiling except in a very forced manner.

On this particular day, his smile was more ominous of evil than ever. There was something like a constrained and impatient feeling of delight, like that of Caliban at the first rolling of the thunder which was the forerunner of the tempest.

Bernard paid no attention to this smile; he felt as if youth, and life, and love, were singing a concert in the depths of his heart.

He glanced round the room with a feeling of surprise,—it may almost be said of uneasiness.

"I thought I heard François's voice. Was he not here just now?"

"He was here, certainly; but he got tired of waiting for you, and so went away."

"All right, we shall meet at the rendezvous."

And Bernard went to the fire-place, took down his gun, blew into the barrels, to satisfy himself that they were clean and unloaded, primed them, poured a charge of powder into *each barrel, and drew* a couple of wads out of his pouch.

"I see," said Mathieu, "that you still make use of those ready made wads."

"Yes, I find they press down the powder more equally. But what can I have done with my knife?"

Bernard searched all his pockets, but could not find what he wanted.

"Will you have mine?" asked Mathieu.

"Yes, give it me."

Bernard took the knife, made two marks in the form of a cross upon the two balls, and then put the balls into the barrels of his gun.

"What are you doing, Monsieur Bernard?" asked Mathieu.

"I have marked my balls, so that I can recognize them again, if there should be any dispute about it. When two persons are shooting at the same boar, and the boar happens to be hit with only one ball, a man is not sorry to know who killed it," said Bernard, as he advanced towards the door.

Mathieu followed him with his squinting eye, which at that moment seemed full of an incredible expression of ferocity.

When the young man had just reached the threshold of the door, he said—

"I have something to say to you, Monsieur Bernard. When you know that it is François, your pet, your favourite, who has tracked the boar, you're not likely to find the game flown. Besides, the dogs won't be able to follow the scent so early as this."

"Well, what have you to say to me?"

"What have I got to say?"

"Yes!"

"Is it true that the wonder of wonders is to arrive to-day?"

"Whom are you speaking of?" asked Bernard, knitting his brows.

"Catherine, of course!"

Scarcely had the name escaped Mathieu's lips, than it was followed by a heavy slap upon his cheek.

He drew back a couple of steps, without the expression of his face altering in the slightest degree; but putting up his hand to the injured part, he said,—

"Why, what is the matter with you this morning, Monsieur Bernard?"

"Nothing," replied the young keeper; "only I wish to

teach you to pronounce that name for the future with the respect with which every one regards it; and I, more than any one."

"Oh!" said Mathieu, still keeping one of his hands upon his face, and rummaging in his pocket with the other; when you learn what there is in the paper I have got in my pocket, you will be sorry for the blow you have just given me."

"In the paper?" repeated Bernard.

"Yes."

"Let me look at it."

"Oh! patience."

"Let me look at it, I tell you."

And with one stride towards Mathieu, he tore the paper from his hands.

It was a letter bearing this address—"To Mademoiselle Catherine Blum, No. 15, Rue Bourg-l'Abbé, Paris."

## CHAPTER V.

### CATHERINE BLUM.

The mere contact of this paper—the mere perusal of the address, made a cold shiver pass through Bernard, as if he had divined that this letter enclosed the revelations of a new existence, a complete series of unknown misfortunes for him.

The young girl to whom the letter was addressed, and whom we have already referred to, was the daughter of Guillaume's sister, and consequently Bernard's first cousin.

It may be asked why did this young girl bear a German name? How was it that she had not been brought up by her father and mother, and why should she happen to be at No. 15, Rue Bourg-l'Abbé, at Paris? This we are about to explain.

In 1808, a column of German prisoners, on their way from the battle-fields of Friedland and Eylau, passed through *France, being* quartered, in the usual military manner, upon

private individuals, in the same manner that the French soldiers themselves were.

A young native of Baden, who had been seriously wounded in the former of these two battles, went with his billet to the house of Guillaume Watrin, who had been married about four or five years; his sister, Rose Watrin, a beautiful young girl of sixteen or seventeen years of age, was residing with him.

The stranger's wound, which was serious enough when he left the military hospital, had become so considerably worse, by long marches, fatigue, and the want of proper attention, that, upon the certificate of the physician and surgeon of Villers-Cotterets, Messieurs Lécosse and Raynal, he was obliged to remain in the native town of the narrator of this story.

They wished to have him sent back to the hospital, but the young soldier exhibited such a dislike to being moved there, that Guillaume Watrin, then a handsome young fellow of about eight-and-twenty to thirty years of age, was the first to propose that he should remain at the Pheasantry, which in 1808 was the name given to Guillaume's residence, situated about a quarter of a league from the town, among the finest and largest trees of that part of the forest called the Park.

One circumstance particularly, which had inspired Frederic Blum—for that was the name of the wounded young soldier—with so strong a dislike to the hospital, was, not only the cleanliness and comfort which surrounded his host and his host's young wife, the excellent air of the Pheasantry, and the delightful view from his little bed-room, which looked out upon the flower-beds of the garden belonging to the keeper's house, and the green trees of the forest, but still more, or indeed principally, on account of the sight of that lovely flower, which one might have been forgiven for thinking had been gathered from one of the beds of the garden, and named Rose Watrin.

She too, when she saw the wounded young soldier, so handsome, so pale, so suffering, about to be placed upon the litter and carried to the hospital, had experienced such a profound sense of suffering, that her heart felt almost broken, and she hurried to her brother, with her hands clasped together and her eyes streaming with tears, yet not venturing to utter a single syllable—far more eloquent, indeed, in her silence, than she would have been by the most earnest language in the world.

Watrin perfectly comprehended all that was taking place in his sister's heart, and influenced far less by the young girl's wishes, than by that fund of pity which is always sure to be met with in men who lead an isolated and solitary life, he consented that the young German should remain at the Pheasantry.

From that moment, by a sort of tacit understanding, Watrin's wife resumed the entire care of her household affairs and of her son Bernard, then about three years of age, while Rose, the lovely forest flower, devoted herself exclusively to the recovery of the wounded soldier.

The wound had been caused—our readers will forgive us for some few scientific expressions which we are obliged to have recourse to—by a ball which had struck against the condyle of the femur, had glided through the apoveurosis of the *fescia lata*, and penetrated deeply into the flesh, where it had lodged, and occasioned a violent irritation. In the first place, the surgeon had fancied that the bone of the femur was broken, and had wished to remove the limb at the hip-joint. But this operation had terrified the young man, not so much on account of the pain with which it would be certain to be attended, as by the idea of a lasting mutilation. He declared that he would far sooner die; and as he had to do with French surgeons, to whom it mattered very little whether he died or not, they had left him in the hospital, where, by degrees, to make use again of a scientific term, the ball had worked its way into the muscular regions by an aponeurotic secretion.

Just at this period, the order arrived for the prisoners to march towards France. The prisoners, whether wounded or not, had been put into carts and had been forwarded to their destination, Frederic Blum like the others, and with the others. He had travelled about a couple of hundred leagues in this way; but on arriving at Villiers-Cotterets, his sufferings had been, as we have described, so intolerable, that it was found impossible for him to proceed any further.

Happily, that which might be regarded as an aggravation of the evil was, on the contrary, a commencement of convalescence. The ball, whether it had been expelled by some violent effort, or had dropped by its own weight, had ruptured its abnormal envelope, and passed through the separation of the muscles, of which it had torn the interstitial tissue in its progress.

*It will be readily* believed, that a miracle of nature of this

kind, and so singular a cure, undertaken by the body on its own account, does not happen instantaneously, or without great suffering. The wounded soldier remained three months upon his fevered couch, after which a marked improvement was manifested; he was able to get up, to walk first of all to the window, afterwards to the door, and then to go out for a walk, leaning upon Rose Watrin's arm, under the huge trees adjoining the Pheasantry; and then, a little later, he happened to feel some foreign substance near the surface of the skin, in one of the bandages of his leg. He sent for the surgeon, who made a slight incision, and the ball, which had nearly been fatal, fell harmlessly into the operator's hand.

Frederic Blum was cured.

But after his recovery he found that there were, in Watrin's house, two wounded persons instead of one.

Fortunately, the peace of Tilsit arrived. A new kingdom had been created from the year 1807; it borrowed, from the ancient duchy of Westphalia, the bishopric of Paderborn, Horn, and Bilefeld; it joined to it a portion of the circles of the Upper Rhine and Lower Saxony; it comprised, besides, the south of Hanover, Hesse-Cassel, and the principalities of Magdeburg and Verden.

This kingdom was called the kingdom of Westphalia. Having remained in a mythical state so long as the great question contended for by force of arms had not been settled by the victories of Friedland and Eylau, it was recognized by Alexander at the peace of Tilsit, and thenceforth was reckoned among the European kingdoms, in which, however, it was only destined to figure during the brief period of six years.

One morning, therefore, Frederic Blum awoke a positive Westphalian, and, consequently, allied to the French people, instead of being their enemy.

The question was forthwith seriously discussed, with regard to the realisation of the idea which had occupied the two young people during the last six months, that is to say, of getting married.

The real difficulty had been removed; Guillaume Watrin was too good a Frenchman to give his sister to a man exposed to the chance of serving against France, and of having to fire upon Bernard, whom his father already saw wearing a uniform, and advancing at the quick-march against the enemies of his country; but Frederic Blum having become a Westphalian, and consequently a Frenchman, the marriage of the young couple was the simplest matter in the world.

Frederic pledged his word, as a true and frank-hearted German, to return before the expiration of three months, and set off.

Tears were shed most copiously at his departure, but honesty and truthfulness were so clearly depicted upon Blum's face, that no one, for a single moment, entertained a doubt about his return.

He had a project in his head, which he did not mention to any one, and this was to go and see the new king at Cassel, and to present a petition to him, in which he would relate his whole story, and conclude by asking for a place as keeper in that forest of eighty leagues long by fifteen broad, which extends from the Rhine to the Danube, and is known as the Black Forest.

The plan was simple and novel, and it succeeded, on account, perhaps, of its simplicity and novelty.

One day, from the balcony of his château, the king observed a soldier holding a paper in his hand, and apparently soliciting his kind offices; he was pleased and happy, as is the case with all kings who are on the first steps of the throne; instead of sending for the petition, he sent for the soldier, who explained, in tolerably good French, the contents of the petition. The king wrote the word *granted* under the prayer, and Frederic Blum, thereupon, found himself head-keeper of one of the cantons of the Black Forest.

A month's leave of absence, to give the new head-keeper time to go in search of his affianced wife, and a present of five hundred florins to assist him on his journey, were added to the appointment, which assured the future of the young couple.

Frederic Blum had begged for three months' absence, and his friends saw him return at the end of six weeks. This, of itself, was so strong a proof of the sincerity of his regard, that Guillaume Watrin had no objection to make.

But Marianne made one, and that of the most serious kind.

Marianne was a true Roman Catholic, going regularly every Sunday to hear Mass at the church of Villers-Cotterets, and taking the Communion on the four great fêtes in the year, under the direction of the Abbé Grégoire.

Frederic Blum was a Protestant, and, in Marianne's eyes, the soul of Frederic Blum was inevitably lost and that of her sister-in-law seriously compromised.

The Abbé Grégoire was accordingly sent for.

*The Abbé Grégoire* was an excellent man, as blind as a

mole, as far as his corporeal eyes were concerned; but this external and material short-sightedness had only rendered his inner sight proportionably acute. It was impossible to possess a clearer and juster appreciation of the things of this world and of the things above than the worthy abbé did, and no priest, ever since self-abnegatory vows were first pronounced by man, has, I am convinced, remained more scrupulously faithful to the vows he has made.

The Abbé Grégoire replied that there was a religion which it was necessary to follow before any other, namely, that of the heart; the hearts of the young couple had vowed to each other a mutual affection; Frederic Blum would follow his own religion, Rose Watrin hers; the children would be brought up in the religion of the country they might inhabit, and, at the last day of Judgment, Heaven, who is all-merciful, would be satisfied by separating—at least, it was the excellent abbé's firm trust—not the Protestants from the Roman Catholics, but simply the good from the wicked.

This decision of the Abbé Grégoire, backed by the two affianced lovers and by Guillaume Watrin, having thus three voices united in its favour, whilst the contrary proposition had only one, that of Marianne, it was agreed that the marriage should take place as soon as the necessary religious formalities could be completed.

These formalities occupied three weeks, after which Rose Watrin and Frederic Blum were married, first at the Mairie of Villers-Cotterets, in the Registry of which their names may still be seen, under the date of the 12th of September, 1809, and afterwards at the church of the same town.

The absence of a Protestant clergyman necessitated the postponement of the marriage at a Protestant place of worship until the arrival of the newly-made couple in Westphalia.

A month later, day for day, they were married over again by the pastor of Verden, and the various ceremonies which were needed to unite the two worshippers of different faiths to each other were scrupulously performed.

At the end of ten months a child was born of the union, a little girl, who received the name of Catherine, and who, in accordance with the custom of the country in which it had been born, was brought up in the Protestant religion.

Three years and a half of unparalleled happiness for the young husband and wife passed away; then occurred the campaign of 1812, the disastrous forerunner of the not less fatal campaign of 1813.

The grand army disappeared amidst the snows of Russia and under the ice of the Beresina. A fresh army was required to be raised forthwith; all those who had already served, every one, too, who had not completed his thirtieth year, were summoned to take up arms.

Frederic Blum, by this decree, found himself in the position of a soldier twice over; a soldier because he had formerly figured in the ranks of the army, and a soldier because he was only twenty-nine years and four months old.

He might possibly have represented, with some success, to the king of Westphalia his motive for claiming exemption, namely, that he occasionally suffered very severely from his old wound; but the idea of such an excuse never entered his mind. He set off for Cassel; presented himself to the king who easily remembered him; asked to be allowed to serve, as formerly, in the cavalry; recommended his wife and child to the prince, and set off as brigadier in the Westphalia Chasseurs.

He was among the victors at Lutzen and Bautzen; he was among the vanquished and slain at Leipzig.

This time, a Saxon ball had passed through his chest, and he fell to rise no more, among the sixty thousand slain and wounded of that day, in which one hundred and seventeen thousand cannon-shot were fired, one hundred and eleven thousand more than at Malplaquet. This is the way in which the succession of ages brings progress.

The king of Westphalia did not forget the promise he had made; a pension of three hundred florins was granted in favour of the widow of Frederic Blum, and found her in the midst of her sorrowing and her tears; but from the commencement of 1814 the kingdom of Westphalia ceased to exist, and King Jerome was no longer reckoned among the number of crowned heads.

Frederic Blum had been killed in the French ranks; at that period of reaction it was quite sufficient for his wife to be regarded somewhat askance in that Germany which had just risen almost to a man against the French. She accordingly set out with the wreck of the French army which was recrossing the frontier; and one morning, with her child in her arms, she knocked at the door of her brother Guillaume.

The mother and child were received by that heart of sterling gold, as if they had been sent from heaven.

The little girl—for she was now three years of age—became *the sister of* Bernard, who was nine; the mother resumed,

upon what had been Blum's sick couch, in the little room from which the gardens of the forest were visible, the place of her late husband.

Alas! the poor woman was far more dangerously ill than her husband had been; fatigue and grief had produced in her a peripneumonia, which degenerated into pulmonary phthisis, and notwithstanding all the care and attention with which her brother and her sister-in-law surrounded her, her disorder terminated fatally.

Towards the end of 1814, — that is to say, at the age of four years,—little Catherine Blum found herself an orphan.

Orphan by name only, be it understood, for she would have found a father and mother in Watrin and his wife, if a father and mother once lost can ever be found again.

But what she did find, and one, too, as tender and devoted as if he had had the same father and mother as herself, was a brother in young Bernard.

The two children grew up together without disturbing themselves in the slightest degree in the world about the political vicissitudes which agitated France, and which, on several occasions, menaced the material existence of their parents.

Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau, returned a year afterwards to Paris, fell a second time at Waterloo, embarked at Rochefort, was chained to and died upon the rock of St. Helena, without those great catastrophes assuming, in their eyes, any of the proportions with which history was one day to invest them.

That which indeed was of real importance to this family, who led so retired an existence amidst the dense foliage of the forest, where the life and death of the great ones of the earth met with so feeble an echo, was, that the Duke d'Orleans, who had again become the proprietor of the forest of Villers-Cotterets, had retained Guillaume Watrin in his situation of head-forester.

This situation had been secured for him, and had even been improved. At the tragical death of Choron, Watrin had been promoted from the keepership of La Pépinière to that of Chavigny, and had necessarily quitted his residence at the Pheasantry for the Maison-Neuve on the Soissons road.

Besides, there was an increased emolument of a hundred francs belonging to the keepership of this district, and an aug-

mentation of a hundred francs was a marked improvement in the salary of the old keeper.

Bernard had during this time been growing up. Admitted as a supernumerary keeper when eighteen years of age, he had been appointed keeper, at a salary of five hundred francs a year, on the very day he attained his majority. The result was a united income of fourteen hundred francs in the same house, which, added to free lodging and the advantages arising from their guns, had introduced ease and comfort into the family.

Every one felt the benefit of this comfort; Catherine Blum had been sent to school at Villers-Cotterets, where she had received an education that had converted her from a peasant girl into a town young lady. And then, too, her beauty had flourished at the same time as her education, and Catherine Blum, at sixteen years of age, was one of the prettiest and most charming girls to be found in Villers-Cotterets, or in the neighbourhood around.

It was about this time that the brotherly affection which Bernard had during his youth entertained for Catherine changed its nature insensibly, and became transformed into the passionate regard of a lover.

Neither of the young pair, however, had penetrated very clearly into this feeling; each of them felt that the other became more and more tenderly regarded as he or she advanced from childhood to youth, but neither investigated the precise feelings of their hearts until a circumstance occurred which proved to them that their double existence had only one source, even as two flowers have only one stem.

Catherine Blum, on quitting her school, that is to say, at thirteen or fourteen years of age, had been apprenticed to Mademoiselle Rigolet, the first milliner in Villers-Cotterets; she remained there a couple of years, and had exhibited so many proofs of intelligence and taste, that Mademoiselle Rigolet had declared, that if Catherine Blum were to pass a year or eighteen months at Paris, so as to acquire the knowledge of the fashions of the capital, she would not hesitate, even without any money being paid down, but merely on condition of a sum of two thousand francs a year being paid to her for six years, to give up business in her favour, and that, too, in preference to anybody else.

This proposal was far too important to be refused without the most serious reflection on the part of Guillaume Watrin *and his wife.*

It was ultimately decided that, supplied with a letter from Mademoiselle Rigolet for her correspondent at Paris, Catherine should set off from Villers-Cotterets, and should take up her abode for twelve or eighteen months in the capital.

The street known as Bourg-l'Abbé was not perhaps one of the streets where fashion reigns under its newest and most elegant aspect; but the correspondent of Mademoiselle Rigolet lived in that street, and Catherine's natural taste was confidently relied upon to correct whatever was most backward in the style of the inhabitants of that mercantile quarter.

It was when Bernard and Catherine were obliged to separate that they really and truly perceived the nature of their affection for each other, and discovered that that affection possessed all the egotism of a lover for the object of his attachment rather than the elasticity of that regard which exists between brother and sister.

Promises to think eternally of each other, to write at least three times a week, and to preserve an unalterable fidelity, were exchanged between the two young people, who, dumb like true lovers, kept shut up in both their hearts the secret of their love, of which, perhaps, they were not themselves fully aware.

During the eighteen months of Catherine's absence, Bernard had obtained, on two occasions, a leave of absence of three or four days; both these brief holidays, which he owed to the special favour of his inspector, who esteemed as men, and appreciated as excellent servants, both father and son, were very naturally employed by Bernard in undertaking a couple of journeys to Paris; these journeys operated as a mode of drawing the bonds which already united the young people more tightly together.

At last the hour of her return had arrived, and, to celebrate this return, the inspector had permitted a boar to be killed. It was with this object that François had risen at three o'clock in the morning, that he had tracked and followed the beast, that he had made his report to Guillaume, that Guillaume had gone personally to verify the report, that the foresters of the district of Chavigny, the acolytes and natural guests of the hosts of the Maison-Neuve, had arranged a rendezvous at the Stag's Leap, and that Bernard, who had been indulging in the sweetest dreams of his cousin's return home, and had come down from his bedroom dressed in his

best, smiling and light-hearted, when the letter placed before him by Mathieu Goguelue had suddenly changed that smile into a frown, and that delight into uneasiness.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PARISIAN.

THE fact was, that Bernard had recognized, in the address of the letter, the handwriting of a young man named Louis Chollet, the son of a timber-merchant of Paris, who, two years before, had taken up his residence with Monsieur Raisin, the first timber-merchant of Villers-Cotterets, who was at the same time mayor of the town.

In this way he learned the practical side of his business; that is to say, that he discharged, while with Monsieur Raisin, the office of salesman, as in Germany, and particularly upon the banks of the Rhine, the sons of hotel-keepers, even of the largest establishments, undertake the office of head-waiters under their father's colleagues.

Chollet, the father, was very rich, and allowed his son for pocket-money as much as five hundred francs a month; and with five hundred francs a month at Villers-Cotterets, a man can keep a tilbury, a saddle-horse, and a horse for his carriage.

In addition to this, and particularly when he has his clothes from Paris and finds a means of paying his tailor with his father's purse, a man has an opportunity of becoming the leader of provincial fashion.

And this was the case with Louis Chollet.

Young, rich, good-looking, accustomed to Paris life, where easy conquests had given him that idea of women in general which young people form who have only had acquaintances among grisettes and kept mistresses, Chollet had imagined that no one at Villers-Cotterets would be able to resist him.

Consequently, on his arrival, and on the very first Sunday after his arrival, imagining that, thanks to his coat which was *cut after the latest* fashion, to his equally well-cut trowsers,

to his open-worked and embroidered shirt, and to his watch-chain, to which a hundred little ornaments were attached, he would, like another Solomon, merely have to throw his handkerchief at whom he pleased, he had presented himself in the ball-room, and, after a careful examination of all the young girls present, had thrown his handkerchief, metaphorically speaking, at Catherine Blum.

Unhappily, the same mischance befell him that had, three centuries earlier, befallen the illustrious sultan, with whom we have had the honour of comparing him; the handkerchief was picked up by the modern Roxalana with as little eagerness as it had been by the Roxalana of the middle ages; and the Parisian, for that was the sobriquet with which the new-comer had been at first baptized, had to put up with his disappointment in the best way he could.

Nay, more than that; in consequence of the Parisian having ostentatiously paid Catherine the most marked attentions on the occasion just referred to, Catherine declined to make her appearance at the ball on the following Sunday.

And all this had taken place in the most natural manner possible; she had read in Bernard's eyes the uneasiness which the assiduous attentions of the young stranger had caused him, and was the first to propose to her cousin, that which he, indeed, accepted with enthusiasm, to pass the Sunday at the Maison-Neuve, instead of Bernard, as he was in the habit of doing ever since Catherine lived in the town, passing his Sunday at Villers-Cotterets.

But the Parisian did not consider himself defeated; he had ordered some shirts of Mademoiselle Rigolet, then some pocket-handkerchiefs, then some collars, all of which had given him a multitude of opportunities of seeing Catherine, who had only been able to oppose to his importunities extreme politeness, as representing the principal in the shop, and a marked coolness of manner as a woman on her own behalf.

These visits of the Parisian to Mademoiselle Rigolet's establishment, and the cause of which it was impossible to misconceive, had made Bernard extremely uneasy; but how could they be prevented? The future timber-merchant was the sole judge of the number of shirts, pocket-handkerchiefs, and collars he required; and if he chose to have four-and-twenty dozen shirts, forty-eight dozen pocket-handkerchiefs, and six hundred collars, it was a matter which in no way concerned Bernard Watrin.

Besides, he was perfectly at liberty to order his shirts one by one, and his pocket-handkerchiefs and collars one by one, by which means he was enabled to enter Mademoiselle Rigolet's shop three hundred and sixty-five times a year.

From this number of days, however, we ought to deduct the Sundays, not because Mademoiselle Rigolet closed her establishment on the Sunday, but because every Saturday, at eight o'clock in the evening, Bernard went to fetch his cousin, whom he took back every Monday, at eight o'clock in the morning. And it is a remarkable circumstance, that no sooner did the Parisian know this custom to exist, than not only did it never occur to him to order anything at Mademoiselle Rigolet's on the Sunday, but also he never thought it necessary to inquire on that day whether the things which had been ordered by him during the week were ready.

It was about this period that the proposition had been made by Mademoiselle Rigolet to send Catherine to Paris, a proposition which, as we have already mentioned in its proper place, had been favourably received by Guillaume Watrin and his wife, and to which Bernard would assuredly have offered a very different kind of resistance had he not imagined that the execution of that project would place a distance of seventy-two kilomètres between the detested Louis Chollet and his own dearly-loved Catherine Blum.

This idea consequently had in some degree, so far as Bernard was concerned, softened the distress of separation.

But, although there were no railways in those days, seventy-two kilomètres were no obstacle to a young man in love, especially when, from his position, there was no necessity to ask leave of absence of his principal, and when he possessed five hundred francs a month pocket money.

The result was, that, against the two voyages which Bernard had made to Paris in the space of eighteen months, Chollet, who was perfect master of his own actions, and who received, on the thirtieth of every month, the same sum which Bernard received, or rather had received on the three hundred and sixty-fifth day of the year—the result was, I say, that against those two voyages, Chollet had made a dozen.

And there was one other remarkable circumstance in addition; namely, that since Catherine's departure for Paris, Chollet had discontinued obtaining his supply of shirts from Mademoiselle Rigolet in the Place de la Fontaine at Villers-Cotterets, but procured what he needed from Paris instead,

from Madame Cretta and Company, No. 15, Rue Bourg-l'Abbé.

It is a matter of course that Bernard had been immediately informed by Catherine of this circumstance, naturally of great importance for Mademoiselle Rigolet, and of equal importance, though very different in its character, for himself.

The human heart is so strangely constituted, that although he was convinced of the sincerity of the feeling which his cousin entertained for him, the ardent pursuit of the Parisian did not cease to excite his anxiety and alarm.

Twenty times did the idea occur to Bernard to fix upon Louis Chollet one of those quarrels which terminate either in a pistol-shot or a sword-thrust; but as, thanks to his occupations and pursuits, Bernard was a dead shot,—and as, thanks to one of his comrades who had been provost-marshal in a regiment, and who, being a near neighbour, had given him as many lessons as he had chosen to take, he could fence exceedingly well, the matter, if it had proceeded to extremities, would not have made him very anxious. But what means were there of picking a quarrel with a man of whom he had no reason to complain in any way? who, polite with every one, was perhaps more particularly so with him than with anybody else? It was utterly impossible.

It was necessary, therefore, to wait for an opportunity; this Bernard had awaited for eighteen months, during which period not a single chance had once presented itself.

But, now, on the very day when Catherine Blum was to return home, a letter, addressed to the young girl, was handed to him, and in the address of that letter he recognized the handwriting of his rival.

The agitation which had seized Bernard at the sight of this letter may, therefore, be easily comprehended.

He turned it over and over again in his hand, as we already have remarked, took his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his forehead tremblingly.

Then, as if he imagined that he might still want his handkerchief, he kept it under his left arm, instead of putting it in his pocket, and with the air of a man who adopts a final resolution, broke the seal of the letter.

Mathieu looked at him as he did so, with the same evil smile still upon his face; and observing that he became paler and more agitated as he read, said,—

"Now, Monsieur Bernard, this is what I said to myself, when I took this letter out of Pierre's pocket: I said, 'Good! I shall enlighten Monsieur Bernard about some of the games this young Parisian is up to, and at the same time get Pierre sent away.' And that is, in fact, what did take place when Pierre confessed that he had lost the letter,—the stupid ass! as if he could not say he had put it in the post. In the first place, there would have been this advantage,—that the Parisian, fancying that the first had gone, would not have written a second, and consequently Mademoiselle Catherine would not have received it, and not having received it, would not have answered it."

At this moment, Bernard, who was reading over the letter a second time, broke off, and exclaimed, with a kind of groan,

"What do you say, answered? Do you mean to say, wretch, that Catherine has written to the Parisian?"

"No," said Mathieu, protecting his cheek with his hand, as if fearing a second blow; "I don't say that, exactly."

"What do you say, then?"

"I say that Mademoiselle Catherine is a woman, and that a daughter of mother Eve can hardly ever resist temptation."

"I ask you positively if Catherine has answered the letter? Do you hear, Mathieu?"

"Well, probably she has not; but then, you know, silence gives consent."

"Mathieu!" cried the young man, with a gesture full of menace.

"In any case, he was to set off this morning to meet her with the tilbury."

"And has he gone?"

"Gone, do you say? How should I know that," said Mathieu, "since I have been asleep here by the oven all the time. But would you like to know?"

"Certainly I should."

"Well, nothing easier. If you inquire at Villers-Cotterets, the first person you ask, 'Have you seen Monsieur Louis Chollet go towards Gondreville with his tilbury?' will answer, 'Yes.'"

"Yes! he has gone there, then?"

"Yes, or no. I'm a stupid sort of a fellow, you know; I merely tell you he *was* to go there; I don't say that he has gone."

"But how could you know that? Ah, I see! the letter had been opened, and then sealed again."

"I know nothing about that. Perhaps the Parisian opened it again to write a postscript, as people call it."

"It was not you, then, who opened it and then sealed it again?"

"What good in that? Do I know how to read? Am I not the greatest dunderhead living, since no one was ever able to drive the A B C into my head?"

"True," murmured Bernard; "but at all events, how do you know he was going to meet her?"

"Why, he said to me, 'Mathieu, you must harness the horse early, because I shall set off at six o'clock with the tilbury, to go and meet Catherine.'"

"Did he say Catherine, quite short?"

"He is hardly the man to stand upon ceremony, is he?"

"Ah!" murmured Bernard, "if I had but been there; if I had but been fortunate enough to hear him."

"Yes, you would have struck him, as you did me; or, rather, no, you would not have struck him."

"Why so?"

"Because, although you shoot with the pistol very well, yet there are some trees among Monsieur Raisin's stock-in-trade which are pierced through and through with balls, and which show that he does not shoot badly either; and because, although you use your sword very well, I don't deny that yet he fenced the other day with the sub-inspector, a man who has just left the army, and touched him almost every time."

"And you think that would have prevented me?" said Bernard.

"I don't say that; but still, you would, perhaps, have reflected before striking the Parisian, a little more than you did before you struck poor Mathieu Goguelue, who is about as helpless as a child."

A movement of pity, almost of shame, passed through Bernard's heart, and holding out his hand to Mathieu, he said,—

"Forgive me, I was wrong."

Mathieu timidly gave him his cold and trembling hand.

"Although—although—" continued Bernard, "you don't like me, Mathieu."

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed the latter, "how can you say such a thing, Monsieur Bernard?"

"Without reckoning that you tell a falsehood every time you open your lips."

"Well," continued Mathieu, "supposing that I have told falsehoods, what then? What do I care whether the Parisian is Mademoiselle Catherine's friend or not, and whether he goes to meet her in his tilbury or stays away, so long as Monsieur Raisin, who does everything Monsieur Chollet wishes, in the hope that he will marry his daughter Euphrosyne, discharges Pierre, and takes me into his service instead? Of course it is far better for me—I don't deny it—that other people should not know that it was I,—but out of regard for you, remember,—who took the letter out of the old man's pocket. That fellow, Pierre, is an old rascal, as sly as the very deuce; and when the wild boar is brought to bay, why, you know, Monsieur Bernard, you must look out for squalls."

Bernard, while answering his own thoughts, and while crumpling the letter in his hand, listened to Mathieu, although he did not seem as if he heard him.

Suddenly turning towards him, and bringing his foot and the butt of his gun down upon the letter, he said,—

"Upon my word, Mathieu, you are——"

"Don't keep it back, Monsieur Bernard," said Mathieu, with his usual half-stupid, half-cunning air; "it does one harm to keep anything back."

"You are a miserable hound," said Bernard; "be off with you."

And he made a step forward, as if to turn the fellow out of the house, in case he should not be disposed to go of his own accord; but, as usual, Mathieu offered no resistance, and at every step Bernard made forwards, he took two backwards.

Then, still walking backwards, but looking behind him, in order not to miss the door, he replied,—

"It would, perhaps, have been better if you had thanked me in a different way; but it is your manner, I suppose. Every man has his own way of acting, as people say. Good-bye, Monsieur Bernard, until we meet again."

And then, when close to the door, and with an accent which indicated all his old and his fresh hatred, he called out,—

"Do you hear? I say, good-bye *until we meet again.*"

And hastening his pace, usually so slow and indolent, he jumped across the ditch which separated the road from the forest, and was soon lost in the shade of the huge trees.

## CHAPTER VII.

### JEALOUSY.

But Bernard's look, instead of following Mathieu in his hurried flight, or remarking the fellow's threatening look and gesture, had fallen once more upon the letter.

"Yes," he murmured; "that he wrote her this letter I can easily understand, for he believes he can succeed in anything; but that she should return exactly by the road which he mentions in his letter, so that she should accept a place in his tilbury, is what I cannot believe. Ah! thank goodness, it is you, François! How glad I am to see you."

These words were addressed to the young keeper, with whom we commenced the first chapter of this story, when waiting before Guillaume's cottage door.

"Yes, it 's I," he said; "but I came to see whether you had not gone off in an attack of apoplexy."

"No, not yet," said Bernard, with a forced smile.

"Make haste, then," continued François; "Robineau, La Feuille, Lajeunesse, and Berthelin, are already at the Stag's Leap, and if Papa Grumbler finds us here on his return, *we* shall be hunted instead of the wild boar."

"In the mean time come here," said Bernard.

These words were pronounced in so harsh and imperative a tone, so little in accordance with Bernard's usual habits, that François looked at him in astonishment; but observing his extreme pallor, the contraction of his features, and the letter he held in his hand, which seemed indeed to be the cause of the change which had taken place in the young man's face and manners, he advanced, half-smiling, half-uneasy, and raising his hand to his cap in the way military men salute their officers, he said,—

"Here I am, my superior."

Bernard, who observed François's eye fixed upon the letter, hurriedly put the hand in which he held the paper behind his back, and placing the other upon François's shoulder, said,—

"What do you think of the Parisian?"

"Of the young man who is staying with Monsieur Raisin, the timber-merchant?"

"Yes."

François nodded his head, and made a sound with his lips, in token of approval and appreciation.

"I think he dresses well," he replied, "and always in the latest fashion, so I'm told."

"I don't refer to his dress."

"To his face, then? Well, he's a good-looking fellow, and it is not for me to say the contrary." And François made another sign of approval.

"I am not speaking to you about his looks," said Bernard impatiently; "I mean, with regard to his moral character."

"His morals?" exclaimed François, intimating, by the tone of his voice, that as soon as his moral character was called into question, his opinion was going to change altogether.

"Yes, his morals," repeated Bernard.

"Well," resumed François, "as to his morals, I should say that he is not very likely to find the track of Madame Watrin's cow, if it were lost in the Meutard field; and yet, a cow leaves a deucedly good track behind her."

"Yes; but is he quite capable of hunting up a young fawn, and of running it down, especially if the fawn wears a cap and a petticoat?"

At this remark, François's face assumed an expression of smiling approval, which there was no mistaking, "Ah! in that respect," he said, "he has the reputation of being a good sportsman."

"So he may be," continued Bernard, clenching his fist; "but don't let him come hunting upon my property, or so much the worse for the poacher."

Bernard uttered these words with such deep menace, that François looked at him almost bewildered.

"Why, what 's the matter?" he said.

"Come here!" said Bernard, and he approached him accordingly.

Bernard put his arm round his comrade's neck, and said to him, as he placed the letter before his eyes, "What do you say to that letter?"

François first looked at Bernard, then at the letter, and then reading the commencement, which began, "Dear Catherine," he said, as he paused for a moment, "Oh, oh! your young cousin?"

"Yes," was Bernard's answer.

"Hum! I don't think it would do him any harm to call her Mademoiselle Catherine, as everybody else does."

"Yes; but that is only the beginning—wait until you get to the end."

François continued, beginning now to understand something about the matter.

"DEAR CATHERINE,—I learn that you are about to return home, after eighteen months' absence, during which time I have scarcely seen you in the brief journeys I have made to Paris, and without ever having been able to speak to you. It is useless to tell you, that during those eighteen months your pretty little face has never been out of my head, and that I have constantly thought of you night and day. As I am very anxious to tell you by word of mouth what I am writing, I will go and meet you as far as Goudreville. I hope to find you more reasonable on your return than you were at your departure, and that the air of Paris will have made you forget that rough, uncouth fellow, Bernard Watrin.

"Your life-long Adorer,

"LOUIS CHOLLET."

"Oh, oh!" said François; "and the Parisian wrote that?"

"Fortunately. 'That rough, uncouth fellow, Bernard Watrin'—you see the words."

"Yes, yes—and Mademoiselle Catherine?"

"Yes, François; I say as you do—'and Mademoiselle Catherine?'"

"Do you believe he has gone to meet her?"

"Why not? These town-bred fellows believe anything! And then, why should he put himself out for a rough clown like myself?"

"Well, but you?"

"I! What about myself?"

"Nonsense! Listen to me—you know, perhaps, how you stand with Mademoiselle Catherine."

"I did know it before she left; but since she has been eighteen months at Paris, who can say what change may not have taken place?"

"But you have been to see her?"

"Twice; but it is eight months since I last saw her, and in eight months so many changes take place in a girl's fancy."

"Come, come—that's not fair of you," cried François; "now, I happen to know Mademoiselle Catherine, and I will answer for her."

"François, François! the best woman living is, if not absolutely false, at all events, a coquette at heart. Oh! those eighteen months at Paris——"

"Well, I tell you, that you will find her on her return just as you found her when she went away, a good and excellent girl, and no one like her."

"But if she gets into his tilbury!" said Bernard, with a menacing gesture.

"Well, what then?" asked François, alarmed.

"Look at these two balls," said Bernard, taking out of his pocket the two balls upon which he had made a cross with the knife Mathieu had lent him; "you see they have my own mark upon them, and which I had made for the purpose of shooting the boar——"

"Well?"

"Well, one of them will be for him, the other for myself."

He dropped the two balls into the barrels of his gun, and ramming down a couple of cartridges, said,—

"Come, François."

"Bernard, Bernard," said the young man, trying to resist.

"I tell you to come, François," exclaimed Bernard violently. "Come, I say."

And he forced him along; but he stopped suddenly, for just before he reached the door he met his mother.

"Mother!" murmured Bernard.

"All right, now the old lady is here," said François, rubing his hands in the hope that his mother's presence would in some respects change Bernard's terrible designs.

The good, kind woman entered, with a smile upon her face, and holding in her hand a plate containing a cup of coffee, with the usual accompaniment of a couple of pieces of toast. She had only to cast a glance at her son, to comprehend, with a mother's instinct, that something extraordinary was the matter with him.

She took no notice of it, however, but accosted him with her usual smile.

"Good morning, my dear boy."

"Thank you, mother," replied Bernard, and he moved towards the door as if about to leave the house, but his mother's voice detained him.

"How did you sleep, boy?" she asked.

"Wonderfully well."

Then, observing that Bernard still continued to approach *the door,*—

"Are you going away already?" she said.

"They are waiting at the Stag's-Leap, and François came to look for me."

"Oh! there is no hurry," said François: "they will be sure to wait, and ten minutes more or less don't make much difference."

But Bernard still advanced nearer to the door.

"One moment, though," resumed the mother: "I have scarcely had time to say good morning to you, and have not kissed you yet."

Then looking up at the sky, she said: "The weather looks heavy to-day."

"Bah!" said Bernard, "it will be sure to clear up. Good-bye, mother."

"Wait a minute."

"Why?"

"Take something before you go out;" and she held out the cup of coffee which she had just prepared for herself.

"Thank you, mother, but I am not hungry," was her son's answer.

"It is the coffee you like so much, and Catherine also," persisted the old woman: "come, drink it."

Bernard shook his head.

"No; well, put your lips to it merely; it will taste far better after you have tasted it."

"Poor, dear mother!" murmured Bernard, as he took hold of the cup, put his lips to it, and replaced it upon the plate.

"Thank you," he said.

"You look as if you were trembling, Bernard," said the old woman, growing more and more uneasy.

"Nay, on the contrary, my hand was never so steady. Look."

And with a gesture common enough with sportsmen, he threw his gun up into the air with his right hand, and caught it in his left.

And then, as if to break the chain, with which he was beginning to find himself entangled,—

"Come, come," he said, "good-bye, mother, this time I must be off."

"Very well, go, since you positively will go; but be back soon, for you know Catherine is coming this morning."

"Yes, I know it," said the young man, with an accent impossible to render; "Come, François."

And Bernard hurried to the door, but just as he reached the threshold, he met Guillaume.

"It's my father, now," he said, as he drew back a step or two.

Guillaume entered, his pipe still in his mouth just as when he left; only that his small grey eye twinkled with evident satisfaction.

He did not even see Bernard, or pretended not to see him, but addressing himself to François, exclaimed,—

"Bravo, boy, bravo! you know I never pay compliments."

"No, far from it," said François, unable, notwithstanding his preoccupation of mind, to repress a smile.

"Well, then, all I say is, bravo!" continued the old keeper.

"Ah! ah!" cried François, "everything is exactly as I told you, then?"

"Everything."

Bernard again made a movement to go out, taking advantage of his father not paying any attention to him; but François stopped him.

"Come, listen, for a minute or two, Bernard," he said; "we are talking about the boar."

"The boars, you mean," repeated Guillaume.

"Yes."

"Well, they are lying there, just as you said, in the old thorn by the Têtes de Salmon, side by side, the sow as big as she can be, the boar wounded in the shoulder; a thick-set fellow, six years old at least; one would fancy you had weighed him. I saw them both as plainly as I see you and Bernard. If I had not been afraid of the others saying to me, 'Was that the reason why you gave us the trouble to come here, Guillaume?' upon my word, without going any farther, I should have settled them both then and there."

"In that case," said Bernard, "you see there is no time to lose. Good-bye, father."

"Don't expose yourself, my boy," said his mother.

The old keeper looked at his wife, with that silent laugh, which seemed as if it could not find a passage through his teeth.

"Well," he said "if *you* like to go and kill the boar instead of him, mother, he can remain at home to attend to the kitchen fire."

And then turning round, and placing his gun in the corner

near the fire-place, and with a movement of the shoulders which was very far from being usual with him, he said,—

"A keeper's wife, too; it's enough to make a man swear."

Bernard had, in the meantime, approached close to François.

"François," he said, "will you make my excuses to the others?"

"Why?"

"Because, at the first turning in the road, I shall leave you."

"Why so?"

"You and the others are going to the old thorn by the Têtes de Salmon, are you not?"

"Well?"

"I am going to the heath towards Goudreville. Each man hunts his own game."

"Bernard!" cried François, seizing hold of the young man's arm.

"Enough!" said Bernard; "I am of age, and free to do what I like."

Then, feeling that a hand was placed upon his shoulder, and seeing that this hand was Guillaume's, he said,—

"What is it, father?"

"Your gun is loaded?"

"Yes."

"A fair ball, such as a good marksman should use?"

"Yes, a fair ball."

"Well, then, you understand; right in the shoulder-joint."

"I know the place, thank you," replied Bernard, as, holding out his hand to the keeper, he said,—

"Give me your hand, father."

He then approached Marianne, and said,—

"And a kiss from you, mother." Then pressing the old woman in his arms, he cried,—

"Adieu, adieu."

And he hurried from the house, whilst Guillaume, looking at his wife, asked her, in a tone which betrayed his uneasiness,—

"I say, mother, what is the matter with the boy this morning? He doesn't seem all right."

"No!" exclaimed the poor woman breathlessly. "You ought to call him back, Guillaume."

"Bah! what for?" replied Guillaume; "to know whether he has had any bad dreams, perhaps?"

And then, advancing to the threshold of the door, with his

pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, he called out,—

"Bernard! do you hear? in the shoulder-joint."

But Bernard had already left François, who was making his way in the direction of the Stag's-Leap by himself.

A voice, which was that of the young man, replied in an accent which made the old man tremble,—

"Yes, father. I know where a ball lodges. Be easy on that score."

"Heaven protect the poor child!" murmured Marianne, making the sign of the cross.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FATHER AND MOTHER.

GUILLAUME and Marianne, left alone, looked at each other. Then, speaking to himself, as if, in such a circumstance, the presence of his wife was not likely to throw any light upon the question he was putting to himself, he said,—

"What the devil does Bernard mean by going towards the town?"

"Towards town!" said Marianne; "is he going towards town?"

"Yes, he has taken the shortest way, too; that is to say, instead of following the road, he has cut right across the forest."

"Across the forest! Are you sure of that?"

"Confound it! there are the others going towards the rendezvous, and Bernard is not with them."

And Guillaume moved forward, partly with the intention apparently of calling the hunters, and partly as if he were about to join them, when his wife stopped him.

"Stay," she said; "I have something to say to you."

Guillaume turned round to look at her; Marianne nodded her head as if to confirm what she had said.

"All right," he exclaimed; "you have always something *to say, if* one were to listen to you. Only, one has to learn

whether what you have got to say now is worth listening to."

And he again made an attempt to leave, so as to learn from François, or from his companions, why Bernard did not go with them.

But Marianne stopped him a second time.

"Why can't you stay," she said, "when I tell you to stay?"

"Well," he said, "what do you want?—make haste."

"Patience! with you one ought always to finish before one has hardly begun."

"Oh!" continued Guillaume, laughing at the opposite corner of his mouth to that where the pipe was placed; "as for you, one knows when you begin, but never when you leave off."

"What, I!"

"Yes. You begin with Louchonneau, and you end with the Grand Turk."

"Well, then, this time I shall begin and finish with Bernard. Does that satisfy you?"

"Go on," said Guillaume folding his arms resignedly; "and I will tell you afterwards."

"This is what I have to say then,—you said just now yourself, that Bernard went towards the town?"

"Yes."

"That he made a cut across the forest, as the shortest way?"

"Well, what then?"

"And lastly, that he has not gone to the rendezvous with the others?

"No—well, do *you* know where he is gone? if you do, tell me, and the affair is at an end. You see, I am listening; if you don't know, it is hardly worth while keeping me."

"You won't forget that it is you who are talking, and not I."

"I won't say another word," said Guillaume.

"Well!" continued his wife; "he is gone to town——"

"To meet Catherine a little earlier, I suppose? What a clever idea! If that is your news, keep it for last year's almanack."

"No; it is you who are wrong, for he has not gone to town to meet Catherine a little earlier, as you fancy."

"Ah! what has he gone to town for, then?"

"He has gone to town to see Mademoiselle Euphrosyne."

"The daughter of the timber-merchant—the daughter of the mayor—the daughter of Monsieur Raisin? Get along with your nonsense."

"Yes, for the daughter of the timber-merchant, for the daughter of the mayor, for the daughter of Monsieur Raisin!"

"Hold your tongue."

"Why so?

"Hold your tongue, I say."

"But at all events——"

"Will you hold your tongue?"

"Why, I never saw such a man in the whole course of my life!" exclaimed poor Madame Watrin, throwing her arms up to heaven in an attitude of despair. "I am never right under any circumstances. I do a thing in one way—I am wrong! I do it in another—I am wrong! I speak—silence! I ought to hold my tongue! I hold my tongue—I ought to speak! But, goodness gracious me, why has one a tongue at all, if it be not to speak when one's heart is full?"

"It seems," replied Guillaume, looking at his wife slily, "that you don't prevent your tongue running as fast as it likes."

And Guillaume, as if he had learned what he wished to know, began to fill his pipe, and to whistle a hunting song, which was a polite intimation to his wife to let the conversation stop there.

But Marianne was made of harder material than to yield so easily.

"Well," she continued; "suppose I were to say that it was the young girl herself who spoke to me about it the first."

"When?" asked Guillaume, laconically.

"Last Sunday, after Mass."

"What did she say to you?"

"She said,—will you listen to me or no?"

"I am listening."

"She said,—'Do you know, Madame Watrin, that Monsieur Bernard is a very *bold* young man.'"

"What, Bernard?"

"I only tell you what she said—'When I pass by, he looks at me in such a way, that if I hadn't my fan with me, I shouldn't know what to do with my eyes.'"

"Did she tell you that Bernard had spoken to her,"

"No, she didn't say that."

"*Well!* what then?"

"Wait a minute! Good gracious, what, a hurry you are in. She then added, — 'Madame Watrin, we are going to pay you a visit some day with my brother; but manage so that Monsieur Bernard is not there, for I should be so very embarrassed, as I think your son a very nice young man.'"

"Yes," said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders, "and that pleases you, I suppose? It tickles your vanity, that one of these fine town young ladies, the daughter of the mayor, should tell you that she finds Bernard a good-looking young fellow."

"Of course it does."

"And that has set your wits to work, and your imagination has been contriving all sorts of plans."

"Why not?"

"And you have been looking upon Bernard as the mayor's son-in-law?"

"Why, if he were to marry his daughter——"

"Well," said Guillaume, taking off his cap with one hand while with the other he seized hold of his grey hair as if he were going to tear it out by the roots, "I have known snipes, and geese, and storks, with more sense in their heads than you. Upon my word, it is enough to make a man ill to hear such stuff. Well, well, it doesn't much matter, for since one is condemned to lead such a life, why one must make the best of it."

"And yet," continued the mother, precisely as if Guillaume had not said a word, "if I were to add that Monsieur Raisin himself stopped me no later than yesterday, as I was returning from marketing, and said to me, 'Madame Watrin, I have heard that you dress a stew so admirably, that I intend some day to go and eat one with you and your husband."

"Why, don't you see the motive of all that?" exclaimed the old man, blowing, as he generally did when very much excited, copious clouds of smoke from his pipe, and beginning to disappear altogether, like Jupiter Tonans, in a cloud of vapour.

"No," replied Marianne, not understanding that any one could see in the words she had repeated any other meaning than that which they seemed to indicate.

And as the explanation was to be of some length, Guillaume, as he usually did, under circumstances of any great importance, took the pipe out of his mouth, placed

his hand behind his back, and with his teeth set together a little more closely than usual, began as follows:

"The mayor is a sly, cunning fellow, half-Norman, half-Picard, who has just honesty enough to escape hanging. Well, he hopes that in getting you to talk of your son, and of your stews, you will draw my nightcap in such a way over my eyes, that if he were to cut down a beech or an oak that doesn't belong to him, I shouldn't take any notice of it. Ah! ah! nothing of the sort, Mr. Mayor, I can assure you. Cut the grass off the common land in your own parish to feed your horses with for what I care, that's no affair of mine; but for all the compliments you may pay me, you shall not cut down, in your own allotment, one stick more than has been sold to you."

Without being beaten, Marianne made a movement with her head, which signified that, after all, there might be something true in what the old man was saying.

"Just as you like, don't let us talk any more about the matter then," she said, with a sigh; "but you won't deny, at all events, that the Parisian is in love with Catherine?"

"Did one ever hear the like?" cried Guillaume with a gesture, as if he were going to dash his pipe upon the ground; "we have now got out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"Why so?" asked his wife.

"Have you done?"

"No."

"Well," said Guillaume, putting his hand to his waistcoat pocket, "I will give you a five-franc piece for all you may yet have to say,—on condition that you don't say it."

"Have you anything to say against him?"

Guillaume took the piece of money out of his pocket.

"Is it a bargain?" he asked.

"A handsome young fellow!" continued the old woman, with an obstinacy which François, in drinking her health, had expressed a wish she might soon get rid of.

"Too handsome!" replied Guillaume.

"Rich!" persisted Marianne.

"Too rich!"

"Glalant!"

"Too gallant! confound him! too gallant! He might get his ears slit for his gallantry, or even lose his ears altogether."

"*I don't* understand you."

"That doesn't matter; it's all the same to me; so long as I understand my own meaning, that's quite enough."

"Admit, at all events," said Marianne, turning away, "that he would be a good match for Catherine."

"For Catherine?" repeated her husband; "in the first place, nothing is too good for Catherine."

The old woman shook her head almost disdainfully.

"She is not likely to go off very easily!" she said.

"That's good; perhaps you will say that she's not pretty."

"Pretty," cried the mother; "why, she is as beautiful as the day."

"That she's not properly behaved?"

"The virgin herself is not purer than she is."

"That she's not rich?"

"Rich, indeed! If Bernard has no objection, she will have the half of what we have."

"Oh!" said Guillaume laughing in his own quiet way, "and you may rest satisfied that Bernard won't make any objection."

"No," said Marianne, shaking her head, "that is not all."

"What next, then?"

"It's the old story of religion over again," said Marianne, with a sigh.

"Ah! yes, because Catherine is a Protestant, like her poor father,—yes, the old story again."

"There are not many people who would be glad to see a heretic enter their family."

"A heretic like Catherine? In that case, I am the very opposite of everybody else; for I thank Heaven every morning that she belongs to us."

"There is no difference among heretics!" continued Marianne, with an assurance which would have done honour to a theologian of the sixteenth century.

"Ah! you know that, I suppose."

"In his very last sermon, which I happened to hear, the Bishop of Soissons declared that all heretics were sure to be damned."

"Well, then, I care just as much for what the Bishop of Soissons said as I do for the ashes of my pipe," said Guillaume, tapping his short black pipe upon his thumb-nail, in order to empty it. "Did not the Abbé Grégoire tell us, not only in his last sermon, but, more than that, in every

sermon he has preached, that the good, and kind, and charitable are the elect of heaven?"

"Yes," returned the old woman, with some warmth; "but the bishop ought to know more than he does, since he is a bishop, and the abbé is only an abbé."

"Ah!" said Guillaume, who, having cleaned out and refilled his pipe, seemed desirous of smoking it quietly; "and now have you said all you had to say?"

"Yes, although that doesn't prevent me from loving Catherine."

"I know that."

"Like my own daughter."

"I don't question it."

"And that whoever were to speak an ill word of her in my presence, or attempted to annoy her in the slightest degree, would find it no easy matter to deal with me."

"Bravo! and now take my advice, old woman."

"What is it?"

"You have said quite enough."

"I?"

"Yes, at least I think so. Now, don't speak except in answer to what I ask you, or, thousand millions of oaths!"

"It is precisely because I love Catherine just as I love Bernard that I have done what I have done," continued the old woman, who seemed, like Madame de Sévigné, to have kept for the postscript her most interesting communication of all.

"The devil!" cried Guillaume, almost frightened; "you have not been satisfied with merely saying, but you have been doing something as well, have you? Well, tell me what you have done."

And Guillaume, replacing his unlighted but ready-filled pipe in the dental arcade which served him as a pair of pincers, folded his arms, and waited.

"Because, if Bernard could marry Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, and the Parisian Catherine——" continued the old woman, breaking off in the middle of her phrase, with a knowledge of oratorical effect of which one would hardly have thought her capable.

"Well, what have you done?" asked Guillaume, who seemed determined not to allow himself to be taken in by any artifice of language.

"*On that day,*" continued Marianne, "Monsieur Guillaume

Watrin would be obliged to acknowledge that I am not such a goose as he seems to think."

"Ah! as far as that goes, I admit it at once; snipes, wild geese, and storks are birds of passage, while for six-and-twenty years you have driven me out of my senses, spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Come, out with it, what have you done?"

"I said to the mayor, who paid me so many compliments about my cooking, 'Well, Monsieur le Maire, we are going to keep two *fêtes* at our house to-morrow; the first because it is the *fête* of Corcy, which is the parish to which we belong, and the second because of my niece Catherine's return. Come and taste my cooking at our house with Mademoiselle Euphrosyne and Monsieur Louis Chollet; and after dinner, if it be fine, we will all go and have a look how the *fête* is getting on.'"

"And he accepted your invitation, I suppose?" said Guillaume, setting his teeth so tightly together that he broke the stem of the pipe, and shortened it another half inch.

"Without any pride at all."

"Oh! you old stork!" cried the old keeper, in despair; "she knows that I can't bear to see the mayor; she knows that I don't care a rush for her mock-modest Euphrosyne; she knows that I can scent her Parisian a mile off; and yet she invites them to dinner at my own house, and, of all days in the year, a *fête* day."

"At all events," said his wife, delighted at having avowed her offence, which weighed so heavily upon her heart, "they are invited."

"Yes, indeed, they are invited!" said Guillaume, fuming with passion.

"One can't tell them not to come, I suppose?"

"No; so much the worse. But I know some one whose dinner won't agree with him very well, or, rather, won't agree with him at all. Good-bye!"

"Where are you going?"

"I heard François's gun, and I am going to see if the boar is killed."

"Guillaume!" said Marianne, beseechingly.

"No."

"If I have done wrong——" and the poor woman clasped her hands together.

"You *have* done wrong."

"Forgive me, Guillaume, my motive was good."

"Your motive good, indeed!"

"Yes."

"They say hell is paved with good intentions."

"Listen to me, Guillaume."

"Let me be, or——" and Guillaume raised his hand.

"Oh!" said Marianne, resolutely, "I don't care for that; but you shall not leave me in this way; you shall not leave me in anger. When people part, at our age above all, Heaven knows whether they will ever see each other again," and a couple of large tears rolled down Marianne's cheeks.

Guillaume saw these tears, and tears were rare occurrences in the old head-keeper's house. He shrugged his shoulders, and, approaching his wife, said,—

"You stupid creature, to talk about my anger, indeed; I am angry with the mayor, and not with my old woman."

"Ah!" exclaimed his wife, as if greatly relieved.

"Come, give me a kiss, old simpleton," continued Guillaume, pressing his wife in his arms, but lifting up his head so as to avoid compromising the safety of his pipe.

"It doesn't matter," murmured Marianne, who, reassured upon the subject of dispute, was not sorry to have something to say upon the details; "but you called me an old stork."

"Well, and what then?" said Guillaume; "is not the stork a bird of good omen? Doesn't she carry happiness to those houses where she builds her nest? Well, you have made your nest in this house, and you have brought it happiness; that is what I meant to say."

"What noise is that?"

The sound of a light cart which quitted the paved high road and stopped before the door of the Maison-Neuve, attracted the old keeper's attention, and at the same moment a young and merry voice was heard calling out:

"Papa Guillaume! Mamma Marianne! it is I! here I am!"

And at these words a lovely young girl, of about nineteen years of age, sprang from the step of the cart and alighted on the threshold of the house.

"Catherine!" cried the keeper and his wife together, as they hurried forward towards the unexpected visitor with their arms opened wide.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE RETURN.

It was, indeed, Catherine Blum, who had just arrived from Paris.

As we have already observed, Catherine was a beautiful young girl of about nineteen years of age, supple and graceful as a reed, with that charming type of German softness imprinted in her whole person. Her fair hair, her blue eyes, her rosy lips, the velvet softness of her cheeks, formed one of those nymphs of the grove whom the Greeks called Glycera or Aglaë.

Of the four arms held out to embrace her, those in which she first sought refuge were the arms of Guillaume; she probably felt that it was there she would be sure to find the completest sympathy. Afterwards, Marianne was embraced in her turn.

While the young girl was kissing her adoptive mother, Guillaume looked all round the room, for it seemed hardly possible that Bernard should be absent when Catherine was there.

During the earlier moments of the meeting nothing was heard but those broken words into which deep emotions betray themselves. But almost immediately afterwards other exclamations, mingled with shouts and cheering blasts of horns, were heard, proceeding from François and his comrades, who were returning victors over that other boar of Calydon.

The old keeper hesitated a moment between the desire to embrace his niece and to ask her all sorts of questions, and the curiosity to see the animal, the shouts and the horns not allowing him a moment's doubt that the boar was on his way to the salting-tub. But just as Guillaume, full of hesitation, was inclining in favour of the wild boar, the hunters made their apparance at the door, and entered, bearing the beast suspended to a long pole by the four feet tied together.

Their appearance momentarily diverted Guillaume's and Marianne's attention from Catherine's arrival, while on the other hand, the hunters, observing the young girl, shouted out a loud hurrah in her honour.

But it cannot be denied—that when the first movement of curiosity was satisfied; when Guillaume had examined the old and the recent wound; when he had congratulated François, who, at sixty paces, had knocked over the old boar like a rabbit; and lastly, when, he had recommended that the entrails of the animal should be put aside, and had invited each of the under-keepers to take a share of the beast,—the head-keeper's whole attention was absorbed in the contemplation of his niece.

François, on his side, delighted to see Catherine, whom he loved with all his heart, and particularly to see her so bright and smiling, a certain proof that nothing had happened to vex or annoy her, declared that he thought he had done quite enough for his friends present, in killing the boar; therefore, in order to devote himself entirely to Mademoiselle Catherine, he would leave his comrades to cut up the body.

The result was, that the conversation, which can scarcely be said to have begun at Catherine's arrival, was resumed some ten minutes afterwards with a volubility which the mass of curiosity that had been accumulating during those ten minutes rendered proportionably noisy.

It was Guillaume who restored a little order in the questions with which she was now beset.

"How is it that you arrive so early, and by la Ferté-Milon road, my dear child?" he asked.

François pricked up his ears at this question, for it acquainted him with a circumstance of which he was not aware, namely, that Catherine had not come by the Goudreville road.

"Yes," repeated Marianne, "why did you come that way? and why do you arrive at seven in the morning instead of arriving at ten?"

"I will tell you why, darling papa; I will tell you, dearest mamma," was the young girl's answer. "It is because, instead of coming by the Villers-Cotterets diligence, I came by that going to Meaux and la Ferté-Milon, which leaves Paris at five in the morning, instead of starting at ten like the other."

"Capital," murmured François, with a satisfaction he could not conceal; "the Parisian will have had all his trouble for nothing."

"Why did you take that road?" asked Guillaume, who did not understand why any one should leave the straight line for a crooked one, and why any one should ride four *leagues* too many without any necessity.

"Because," said Catherine, blushing at the falsehood she was about to tell, innocent though it was, in reality, "there was no room in the diligence going direct to Villers-Cotterets."

"Yes," said François to himself, "that's an idea for which Bernard will thank you, you dear little creature."

"Look at her!" cried Madame Watrin, passing from a general inspection of her to details, "she has grown fully a head.'

"And why not a neck too?" said Guillaume, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well," persisted Marianne, with that obstinacy of disposition which was so much a part of her character that she applied it to matters of little as well as of great importance, "it is very easy to prove; when she went away I measured her height; the mark is against the side of the door. See, there it is; I look at it every day. Come and look at it, Catherine."

"You have not quite forgotten the poor old man?" said Guillaume detaining Catherine to embrace her.

"Oh! how can you ask such a thing, my own dear father?" exclaimed the young girl.

"Come and look at your mark, Catherine," persisted Marianne.

"Will you hold your stupid tongue," said Guillaume, stamping his foot on the ground.

"Have I really grown so much?" said Catherine to Guillaume.

"Come to the door and you will see," said Marianne.

"What a confounded old creature," said the old forester; "she will never let go her hold. Well, go to the door, Catherine, or we shall not have a moment's peace all day."

Catherine went to the door, and placed herself against her mark, which was now quite hidden behind the top of her head.

"Well, what did I say?" cried Madame Watrin, triumphantly; "more than an inch."

"That doesn't make quite a head; but it doesn't matter."

And Catherine, delighted at having given her aunt pleasure, returned to old Guillaume's side.

"And so you have been travelling all night?" said her uncle.

"Yes, all night, father dear," replied the young girl.

"In that case, poor child," cried Marianne, "you must be

almost dead with fatigue and hunger. What will you take? some wine, or coffee, or a basin of broth? Stay, some coffee will be best of all. I will go and make it myself."

And Madame Watrin began feeling in her pockets.

"Where are my keys? There, I don't know what I have done with my keys now. Oh, I suppose they are lost! Where can I have put my keys? Wait a bit, wait a bit."

"I assure you, dear mother, I don't want anything."

"Don't want anything! after a whole night passed in the diligence, and in a chaise, as well? Nonsense! If I only knew where my keys were," said Madame Watrin, as she turned her pockets inside out in a kind of fury.

"It is really no matter!" said Catherine.

"Ah, here they are!" cried Marianne. "No matter, do you say? I know better than you, I should think; after travelling, and particularly all night, you must need something to revive you in the morning. The night does no one any good, for the night air is always cool. And at eight o'clock in the morning you have got nothing warm upon your stomach! You shall have your coffee in a minute, my child, in a minute."

And the good old woman bustled out of the room as fast as she could.

"At least," said Guillaume, looking after her, "she has a capital mill to grind her coffee if it is the same as she uses for grinding her words."

"Oh! my own dear, darling, little father," said Catherine, giving way unrestrainedly to her affection for the old keeper, without any fear of awakening the jealousy of his wife, "will you believe that that tiresome postilion spoilt all my pleasure in crawling along at a foot-pace all the way, and taking three hours to come from Ferté-Milon here?"

"And what pleasure did you intend to give yourself, or rather to give us, dear child?"

"I wanted to arrive here at six in the morning, to be in the kitchen without saying a word, so that when you called out 'My breakfast, wife!' I should have brought it to you, and should have said, as I used to do in those dear old times, 'Here it is, father dear.'"

"Was that what you wished to do, you darling angel?" said Guillaume. "Let me kiss you, as if you had done it. Oh! that stupid brute of a postilion! he mustn't have anything for himself."

"That is the very thing I said; but, unfortunately, it is done."

"What is done?"

"Why, when I saw, in the distance, the dear house where my early days were passed, I forgot all; I drew a five-franc piece from my pocket, and I said to the driver; 'Here, that is for you, my friend, and may Heaven bless you.'"

"Dear child! dear child!! dear child!!!" cried Guillaume.

"But tell me, father dear," said Catherine, who ever since her arrival had been looking round the room very anxiously, and who had not the courage to remain any longer satisfied with that silent and fruitless investigation.

"Yes, it is odd, isn't it?" asked Guillaume, comprehending the cause of the young girl's uneasiness.

"It seems——" murmured Catherine.

"As if some one who ought to be here before anybody else, was wanting," said Guillaume.

"Bernard!"

"Yes; but don't be uneasy, he was here just now, and cannot be far away. I will run off to the Stag's Leap, where I shall be able to see along the road for half a mile, and if I see him, I will beckon to him to come."

"Then you don't know where he is?"

"No," said Guillaume, "but if he be within a quarter of a mile of the place, he will be sure to hear me call him."

And Guillaume, who was as much at a loss as Catherine to imagine the cause of Bernard's absence, left the house, and with his most rapid stride, hastened, as he had said, towards the Stag's Leap.

Left alone with François, Catherine approached the young man, who had remained almost silent during the preceding scene, and looked at him, as if she could read to the bottom of his heart, should he attempt to conceal anything from her.

"And do you know where he is, François?" she asked.

"Yes," replied François, answering her with his lips and head at the same time.

"Well, where is he?"

"On the Goudreville road," said François.

"On the Goudreville road?" exclaimed Catherine. "Good Heavens!"

"Yes," continued François, laying a particular stress upon his words to give them all the importance they were intended to convey, "he is gone to meet you."

"I have to thank you, François," said Catherine, with increasing emotion, "for it was you who inspired me with the

idea of returning by way of Ferté-Milon, instead of returning by Villers-Cotterets."

"Hush! here is the mother coming back," said François. "All right, she has forgotten the sugar."

"So much the better!" said Catherine.

Then, casting a look upon Madame Watrin, who, after having placed her coffee upon the walnut-wood side-board, hurriedly disappeared in search, as François had said, of her sugar, she approached the young man, and, taking hold of his hand, said,—

"Will you do me a favour, François?"

"A favour! Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, anything you like, night and day."

"Well, then, dear François, go and meet him, and tell him that I have arrived, and that I came by the Ferté-Milon road."

"Is that all?" said François.

And he was going to run off, by the door leading on to the high road; but Catherine, with a smile, stopped him and said,—

"No, not that way."

"You're right; what a stupid donkey I am! The old man would be sure to see me, and would ask me where I was going."

And, instead of leaving by the door which opened upon the high road, François jumped out of the window which looked upon the forest. It was quite time, too, for Marianne was returning with the sugar.

"Ah!" said François, "here she comes, and no mistake;" and with a last sign to Catherine before disappearing among the trees, he added: "Be easy, Mademoiselle Catherine, I will bring him back."

At this moment Madame Watrin returned, put the sugar into the coffee, just as she would have done for a child, and, presenting it to Catherine, said—

"Here, take your coffee; but, wait, it is too hot, perhaps. I will blow it for you."

"Thank you, mamma," said Catherine, smiling and taking the coffee; "I assure you that, since I left you, I have learned to blow my coffee for myself."

Marianne looked at Catherine with affection mingled with admiration, and folding her hands one over the other, and shaking her head with an expression of extreme satisfaction, *she said, after* a moment's contemplation,—

"Did it cost you much to bid adieu to the great city?"

"Oh! no, for I knew no one there."

"What! don't you regret the theatres, the walks, and the gay company?"

"I regret nothing, dear mother."

"You did not fall in love with any one, then, at Paris?"

"At Paris? No, no one."

"So much the better!" said the old lady, pursuing her former idea, which had met with so indifferent a reception an hour previously from her husband; "for I have found out a way of settling you in life."

"Of settling me in life!"

"Yes; you know that Bernard——"

"Oh! dear, kind mother!" exclaimed Catherine, full of happy thoughts, and deceiving herself at this opening.

"Well! Bernard——"

"Bernard!" repeated Catherine, beginning to feel alarmed.

"Well, you must know that Bernard is in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosyne."

Catherine could not check the exclamation which sprang to her lips; she became terribly pale, and stammered out in a trembling voice,—

"Bernard—Bernard in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosyne? Oh! mamma, what are you saying?" and the poor girl, putting down the cup of coffee which she had scarcely touched with her lips, sank into a chair.

When Madame Watrin was in pursuit of a particular train of thought, she was affected with that voluntary short-sightedness peculiar to persons of an obstinate turn of mind; in other words, she saw nothing but the idea which possessed her.

"Yes" she continued; "Bernard is in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, and she also is in love with Bernard—so much so, indeed, that there is nothing to do but to give one's consent for the affair to be settled."

Catherine, with a sigh, passed her handkerchief across her face, which was as white as marble.

"There is only one thing," continued her aunt; "my old man don't like it."

"Ah, indeed!" murmured Catherine, reviving a little at these words.

"Yes; he persists in saying that it is all a mistake, that I am as blind as a mole, and that Bernard is not in love with Mademoiselle Euphrosyne."

"Ah!" said Catherine, breathing a little more freely.

"Yes; he persists in that—he says that he is quite sure of it."

"My dear uncle!" murmured Catherine.

"But now you are here, my child, you will help me to persuade him."

"I?"

"And when you are married yourself," continued the aunt, by way of advice to her niece, "always try to maintain your authority over your husband; or, if not, there will be sure to happen to you what has happened to me."

"What is that?"

"That you will be reckoned as of no importance at all in the house."

"Dear mother," said Catherine, raising her eyes towards Heaven, with an indescribable expression of prayer, "at the end of my life I shall say that Heaven has overwhelmed me with blessings, if he should have given me an existence like yours."

"Oh! oh!"

"Do not complain, for my uncle loves you so much."

"I have no doubt he loves me," replied the old woman, with an embarrassed air, "but——"

"No *but* at all, my dear aunt. You love him—he loves you; Heaven has kindly permitted your union; and the happiness of life is in those two words." And Catherine rose and advanced a few steps towards the staircase.

"Where are you going?" asked Marianne.

"To my own little room," said Catherine.

"Of course, we expect company, and you will make yourself as smart as possible."

"Company?"

"Yes — Monsieur Raisin, Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, Monsieur Louis Chollet, the Parisian—I believe you know that gentleman!" and she accompanied this last phrase with a peculiar smile, as she added, "Make yourself as smart as possible, my child."

But Catherine shook her head sorrowfully, as she answered, "Heaven knows, that is not the reason why I am going up stairs."

"What is it, then?"

"Because my bedroom looks out upon the high road by which Bernard will return, and because Bernard is the only *one in* the house who has not welcomed me home." And

Catherine slowly ascended the staircase, the wooden stairs creaking under her feet, light and small as they were.

No sooner had she entered her bedroom, than she uttered a deep sigh, which Marianne overheard, and looking after her with astonishment, seemed, from that moment only, to begin to comprehend something of the true state of the case.

Madame Watrin, whose mind did not pass very easily from one idea to another, would, very probably have remained absorbed in a search after the luminous point which was beginning to glimmer faintly into existence in the depths of her brain, if she had not heard a voice immediately behind her, saying,—

"I say, Madame Watrin!"

Marianne turned round and recognized Mathieu, dressed in a shabby-looking frock-coat, which seemed as if it had formerly been a livery.

"Oh! it's you, is it, you scamp?" she said,

"Thank you," said Mathieu, taking off his hat, which had a faded imitation gold band round it; "only, don't forget that from this day I take the place of that old fellow Pierre, and am now one of the mayor's servants; so that if you insult me, you insult the mayor."

"Very good: but what have you come here for?"

"I have come as a courier; they haven't had time yet to spoil my digestion with good living, so why should I put myself out of breath for them. I have come as a courier to announce that Mademoiselle Euphrosyne and her papa have just arrived in their carriage."

"In their carriage?" exclaimed the old lady, bewildered at the idea of receiving company who arrived in their own carriage.

"Yes; in their carriage, that's all."

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Madame Watrin; "and where are they?"

"The papa and Monsieur Guillaume are talking together about business matters."

"And Mademoiselle Euphrosyne?"

"Here she comes," said Mathieu.

And entering at once upon his functions as a servant, he called out,—

"Mademoiselle Euphrosyne Raisin, the daughter of the mayor."

## CHAPTER X.

### MADEMOISELLE EUPHROSYNE RAISIN.

THE young girl, who was preceded by this pompous announcement, entered, with a most majestic bearing, into the old head-keeper's house; not attempting to conceal her conviction of the great honour she was conferring upon the humble roof by crossing its threshold.

It was impossible to dispute her right to be regarded as beautiful, but it was a beauty which excites very little sympathy, made up of pride and vulgarity, mingled with that freshness of youth which young people of the lower class so justly term *la beauté du diable.*

She was dressed out with that exaggerated profusion of ornaments which is a sure indication of the provincial fine lady.

As she entered, she cast a glance all round the room, in evident search of the two persons who were absent, Bernard and Catherine.

Madame Watrin stood as if she were entranced at the brilliant beauty who made her appearance, at nine o'clock in the morning, as fully dressed as she would have been in the evening for a ball-room lighted up with five hundred wax candles.

Then hurrying towards a chair, which she pushed towards her fair visitor, she exclaimed,—

"Oh! my dear young lady."

"Good morning, dear Madame Watrin," replied Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, with a patronizing air, intimating at the same time that she preferred standing.

"Is it possible that it is you! under our humble roof too! Do pray sit down; the chairs are certainly not stuffed like those at your own house; but never mind, pray sit down all the same. I am not dressed yet; but the fact is, I didn't expect to see you so early."

"You will excuse us, I am sure, my dear Madame Watrin," replied Euphrosyne; "but people are always in a hurry to see those they love."

"Oh! you are too good! I am quite confused."

"Bah!" said Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, taking off her

mantle, and displaying a magnificent ball-dress underneath. "You know that I do not stand upon ceremony, and therefore I have come just as you see me."

"I see," said Madame Watrin, quite bewildered, "that you are as beautiful as an angel and as splendid as a shrine; but it is not my fault if I am late; the reason is, that my little girl has arrived this morning from Paris."

"You mean, I suppose, your niece, little Catherine?" inquired Mademoiselle Euphrosyne negligently.

"Yes; but we are both wrong—I, in calling her little girl, and you, in calling her little Catherine; she is really and truly a great girl, and is a head taller than I am."

"So much the better," observed Mademoiselle Euphrosyne; "I am very fond of your niece already."

"It does her great honour, mademoiselle," said Madame Watrin, courtesying.

"What wretched weather!" continued the city young lady, passing from one subject to another, as became a mind as highly cultivated as her own; "can you understand it, and for the month of May, too?"

And then as if incidental to her preceding remark, she continued,—

"By the bye, where is Monsieur Bernard; out shooting, perhaps. Did I not hear that the inspector had been good enough to grant you permission to kill a wild boar, on account of its being the *fête* of Corcy?"

"Yes, and also because of Catherine's return."

"Ah! do you suppose the inspector thought anything about her return?" said Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, in a somewhat uncivil intonation of voice, which was intended to intimate that the discharge of his duties must necessarily occupy the inspector very little, if he could find time to think of such a trifle as that.

The old lady felt instinctively Mademoiselle Euphrosyne's ill-humour, and applying herself to that part of the conversation which she imagined would be most agreeable to her guest, she said,—

"Bernard, did you say? You were asking where Bernard is? I really don't know. He ought to be here, since you are here. Do you know where he is, Mathieu?"

"I?" replied Mathieu; "why do you think I should know?"

"He is probably with his cousin," said Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, with some little asperity.

"Oh! no, no!" said Marianne eagerly.

"And is your niece prettier?"

"My niece?"

"Yes."

"Prettier, do you say?"

"That is what I asked you."

"She is nice-looking," replied Madame Watrin, in some embarrassment.

"I am delighted she has returned," continued Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, resuming her patronizing airs; "provided she has not acquired any manners or habits at Paris above her position in life."

"Oh! there is no danger of that. You know she went to Paris to learn dressmaking."

"And you fancy she learnt nothing at Paris but that? So much the better! But what is the matter with you, Madame Watrin, you seem disturbed?"

"It is no matter, mademoiselle. However, if you will allow me, I will call Catherine, who will stay with you while I go——"

And Madame Watrin cast a despairing glance at her own humble attire, which was nothing more than her every-day costume.

"Do just as you please," replied Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, with an ease of manner full of assumed dignity. "For my part, I shall be delighted to see the dear little thing."

Scarcely had Madame Watrin received her visitor's permission, than, going to the bottom of the staircase, she called out,—

"Catherine! Catherine! come down, dear; come down at once. Mademoiselle Euphrosyne is here."

Catherine appeared immediately upon the landing.

"Come down, my child, come down!" said her aunt.

Catherine descended the staircase silently.

"Now, mademoiselle, if you will allow me?" said Marianne, turning towards the mayor's daughter.

"Of course, of course."

And as the old lady withdrew with a profusion of courtesies, Euphrosyne cast a hurried side-glance at Catherine as she approached, adding to herself, as she frowned slightly, with a vexed air,—

"Why, she is more than nice-looking! What did the old woman mean?"

Catherine in the mean time advanced with a perfectly un-

embarrassed, and also with an unaffectedly modest, air, and stopping before Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, who stood looking at her with her most dignified manner, said, with a charming simplicity,—

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, but I was not aware you were here; otherwise I should have hurried down stairs in order to present my respects to you."

"Oh!" muttered Mademoiselle Euphrosyne to herself, and yet speaking sufficiently loud, so that Catherine should not lose a word of her monologue; "*not aware you were here—hurried down stairs to present my respects!* Why, upon my word, she is a perfect Parisian, and we must get her married to Monsieur Chollet; the two will make an excellent couple."

Then turning towards Catherine, she said, in a bantering tone,—

"Mademoiselle, I have the honour to salute you."

"Did my aunt think of asking you whether you would take anything, mademoiselle?" inquired Catherine, without appearing to take the slightest notice of the unfriendly feeling which the mayor's daughter had allowed to escape in her manner of address.

"Yes, mademoiselle, but I required nothing."

And then, as if desirous of discontinuing the footing of equality on which they had hitherto been conversing, she said,—

"Have you brought any new patterns from Paris?"

"I attempted, during the few weeks which preceded my return, to collect every novelty I could procure, mademoiselle."

"You learnt to make bonnets there?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Whom were you staying with? With Madame Baudrand or Madame Barenne?"

"In a far less distinguished establishment, mademoiselle; but, notwithstanding that circumstance, I hope to have learned my business just as well."

"We shall see that," replied Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, with her patronizing air; "as soon as you are settled in your shop in the Place de la Fontaine, I will send you some old caps to be retrimmed, and a last year's bonnet to be done up."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Catherine, bowing.

But suddenly the young girl raised her head, listened and

started, She seemed to fancy she had heard her own name pronounced. Nor was she mistaken, for a voice which her heart easily recognized was heard outside, as it drew rapidly nearer and nearer to the house.

"Catherine! where is Catherine?"

At the same moment, covered with dust and with the perspiration pouring down his face, Bernard darted into the room.

"Ah!" he cried, when he perceived Catherine, and with the accents of a man who, having been a long time under water, returns to the surface to draw his breath—"ah! thank Heaven, it is you at last."

And he sank into a chair, still holding the young girl by both her hands.

"Bernard! dear Bernard!" cried Catherine, as she held out her cheek for him to kiss.

At the cry which had sprung from her son's lips, Madame Watrin hurried into the room, and observing on one side, Mademoiselle Euphrosyne standing up, with no one near her, and her face full of vexation and annoyance; and on the other, that little group isolated from the whole world, and wrapped up in its own happiness, she perceived the error into which she had fallen, with regard to her son's affections for Mademoiselle Raisin; and wounded to the quick to find her own perspicuity so completely at fault, she exclaimed,—

"What! Bernard! is that the way to behave?"

But he, without listening to his mother, and without observing Mademoiselle Euphrosyne's presence in the room, said,—

"Ah! Catherine, if you only knew what I have suffered. I thought—I feared—but never mind now, since you are here. You came by way of Meaux and la Ferté-Milon, did you not? I know you did, for François told me so; so that you must have been travelling all night, and have come three leagues in a chaise. Poor dear darling Catherine, how happy I am to see you again."

"Why, boy," said the mother indignantly, "you don't seem to be aware that Mademoiselle Euphrosyne is in the room."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, mademoiselle," said Bernard, looking up at the young girl; "quite true; pray forgive me, I did not see you."

Then turning again towards Catherine, he went on,—

"How she has grown! how pretty she is! Look at her, mother, just look at her."

"Have you had good sport, Monsieur Bernard?" asked Euphrosyne, whose voice reached Bernard's ear like a vague sound, but the sense of which he managed to seize.

"I? No—yes—I hardly know," he said. "Who has been out out shooting? Excuse me; I am losing my senses, I think, with sheer happiness. I went to meet Catherine, and that is all I have done."

"And you did not meet her, it seems?" replied Euphrosyne.

"No, fortunately, I did not!" exclaimed Bernard.

"Fortunately?"

"Yes, yes, certainly; and this time I *do* know what I am saying."

"If *you* know what you are saying, Monsieur Bernard," resumed Euphrosyne, holding out her hand, as if in search of something to lean upon, "*I* don't know what is the matter with me, for I do not feel well."

But Bernard was so occupied with Catherine, who smiled upon him so tenderly, and thanked him with such soft pressures of his hand, for the agitation of which he had just given such marked proofs, that he did not hear Euphrosyne's remark, and did not observe her real or assumed pallor and extreme perturbation.

It was the very reverse, however, with Madame Watrin, who had not taken her eyes off Mademoiselle Euphrosyne.

"Good heavens! Bernard!" she exclaimed, "do you not hear that mademoiselle is not well?"

"Not at all unlikely, either," was Bernard's reply; "it is far too warm here. Mother, give your arm to Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, and François will take a chair outside."

"Here's a chair," said François.

"No, no; it is a mere nothing," said Euphrosyne.

"Yes, indeed!" persisted Madame Watrin; "you are quite pale, my dear young lady, and you look as if you were going to faint."

"Mademoiselle requires the fresh air," said Bernard.

"Yes, if at least you will give me your arm, monsieur," said Euphrosyne, with a languishing air.

Bernard perceived that it was impossible to draw back.

"With the greatest pleasure, mademoiselle," he said; and then added in an under-tone, to Catherine,—"remain where you are, I shall be back directly."

He then took Euphrosyne by the arm, and hurrying

her away, more quickly indeed than her seeming weakness justified, he said,—

"Come, mademoiselle;" while François, in compliance with the order he had received, followed them, saying, as he went, "Here is the chair;" and Madame Watrin added, "And here is some vinegar to rub your temples."

Catherine was left alone. All that had just passed before her eyes, the unfeigned eagerness and anxiety which Bernard had exhibited, and the pretended faintness with which Euphrosyne declared herself to have been overcome, had spoken with far greater distinctness to her heart than all the explanations and all the oaths in the world could possibly have done.

"Ah!" she said, "my aunt may tell me what she pleases, I am quite easy now."

Scarcely had she uttered these words, when Bernard returned and threw himself at her feet. At the same moment, François, shutting the door from the outside, left them alone, with their pure affection and unalloyed happiness.

"Oh! Catherine," exclaimed Bernard, as he threw his arms round the young girl, "how I love you! how happy I am!"

Catherine bent down her head; the eyes of the young pair translated so well all they had to say, that, without pronouncing a single word, their lips met in a passionate embrace.

From both their bosoms a cry of deep, pure, unutterable joy escaped, as though their two voices were one, and, gazing at each other through their tears, they remained plunged in a feeling of happiness so profound, that they did not see Mathieu's face, stamped with a look of the bitterest hatred, peering through the half-opened door of the kitchen, nor hear his voice, as it murmured,—

"Ah! Monsieur Bernard, you have struck me, remember; that blow shall cost you dearly."

## CHAPTER XI.

### LOVE DREAMS.

An hour afterwards, like birds which have taken their flight, carried along by the morning breeze, or by a ray of the sun, or by the soft trembling of the leaves, the two young people had disappeared, and in their place, in the low-ceilinged room of the Maison-Neuve, two men leaning over a plan of the forest of Villers-Cotterets, were engaged in tracing a circle, which one of them showed an evident disposition to enlarge, notwithstanding the other took immediate measures to rectify every mistake, and to compel him to withdraw within the ascertained boundaries.

These two men were Anastase Raisin, mayor of Villers-Cotterets, and Guillaume Watrin, our old friend.

The boundaries which the timber-merchant seemed so desirous of extending, and which the keeper kept so pitilessly within the line traced by the compass of the inspector, were those of the property which had been purchased by Maître Raisin at the last adjudication.

After a while, Guillaume Watrin, nodding his head, in token of approbation, and knocking out the ashes of his black pipe against his nail, said,—

"Well, you have a very nice lot there, and not at all dear."

"Do you call two hundred thousand francs not at all dear?" he said. "It seems that you find money easy enough to get, Monsieur Guillaume."

"That's very likely," replied the latter. "Nine hundred francs a year, lodging, firing, a couple of rabbits every day, and a piece of boar on holidays, one can easily get rich with it, can't he?"

"Bah!" was the timber-merchant's reply, looking at Watrin, and smiling with that significant smile which might almost be called a commercial smile, "any man can become rich when he likes; relatively speaking, of course."

"I wish you would tell me your secret, then," replied Guillaume; "it will give me a great deal of pleasure, I can tell you."

The timber-merchant again fixed his sharp bright eyes

upon the old keeper, and then, as if he thought that the moment of making so important an opening was not just then propitious, he replied,—

"Never mind now; you shall learn what the secret is after dinner, when we are together over a quiet glass of wine, and drinking the healths of our respective children; and if there is any means of coming to an understanding together—do you catch my meaning, Guillaume?—we shall easily arrange matters."

Guillaume, in his turn, looked at him, and puckered up his lips and shook his head doubtingly; and it would not be easy to guess the answer he was going to make to the sort of semi-overture of the mayor, when Marianne hurried into the room, almost out of breath.

"Oh! Monsieur le Maire, here's a mishap!" she exclaimed.

"What's the matter, in Heaven's name?" said the latter.

Watrin himself, accustomed to his wife's peculiar ways, seemed far less upset than his guest, the timber-merchant.

"What's the matter?" said the mayor.

"What has happened, old lady?" said Watrin.

"Why, this has happened; that Mademoiselle Euphrosyne says she don't feel well."

"Bah! it won't be anything very serious," said the mayor, who probably knew his daughter as thoroughly as Guillaume knew his wife.

"The proud little upstart!" said the keeper to himself; for on his side, he seemed to have formed a tolerably correct opinion with regard to the precise amount of merit to which Mademoiselle Euphrosyne was entitled.

"But," continued Marianne, "she insists upon returning home at once."

"Well, let her do so!" said Monsieur Raisin; "is Chollet there? If so, he can bring her back again by-and-by."

"No; no one has seen him yet, and that is the reason, I think, why mademoiselle is worse."

"And where is Euphrosyne, then?"

"She has got into the calèche again, and wants to speak to you."

"Very well, I'll go. Good-bye, Watrin, we have a good deal to talk over together; I shall take her home, and in an hour's time—for the horses are good—I shall be back here again, and if you are a proper sort of fellow——"

"If I am a proper sort of fellow!" said Guillaume.

"Come, shake hands; I don't say anything more about it now. Good-bye, Watrin—good-bye, Madame Watrin; take care of the dinner, and there will be a few pins for you to fasten your kitchen apron with."

And as the mayor left the room with these words, Marianne followed him to the door with a profusion of courtesies, saying,—

"Good-day, Monsieur le Maire; pray make our excuses to Mademoiselle Euphrosyne."

Guillaume never stirred from his place, but stood there shaking his head suspiciously. There was no doubt he was not mistaken as to the cause of the mayor's amiability; for he saw plainly, as he had already expressed it, that the mayor wished to pull his cotton night-cap over his eyes.

As soon as Marianne returned to where he was standing, bitterly disappointed at Mademoiselle Euphrosyne's departure, she said,—

"Ah! my old man, I hope you will scold Bernard well."

"What should I scold him for?" asked the old keeper sharply.

"What for? why, because he had eyes for no one but Catherine, and hardly took any notice of Mademoiselle Raisin."

"And I suppose the reason was, that he has seen Mademoiselle Raisin nearly every day during the last eighteen months," replied Guillaume, "and that during those same eighteen months, he has only seen his cousin twice."

"It don't matter—ah! never mind."

Guillaume remained perfectly insensible to this expression of despair, which even seemed to inspire him with some impatience; for, looking at his wife, he said abruptly:—

"I say, old woman!"

"Well, what?"

"Did you hear what the mayor said?"

"What about?"

"About the kitchen, which he told you not to forget to look after."

"Yes."

"Well! that was not bad advice he gave you."

"But, at all events, I wanted to tell you——"

"And then, you know, there is the tart to put into the oven."

"Ah! I understand you now, you want to send me away."

"No, I don't want to send you away, but I merely tell you to go and see what's doing in the kitchen."

"Oh! very well, sir," said Marianne, wounded in her dignity; "I will go to the kitchen, if go I must."

"There now!" said the keeper, looking at his wife as she moved away; "when I think that it costs you no more trouble than that to be amiable, and that you are so, so very seldom."

"Ah! I am amiable because I am going away. That is very civil of you, indeed!"

Guillaume walked up to one of the windows, took his pipe out of his pocket, and began to whistle an air.

"Well, I'm sure!" continued his wife, "it's very polite of you to whistle in that way;" and when she reached the kitchen-door, she added, "I'm going now," and disappeared.

"Yes," murmured Guillaume, when he was left alone,—"yes, I whistled, because I see those two poor dear children coming towards the house, and it does me good to see them. Now, would not any one," he continued, although there was no one with him to whom he could communicate his own happy feelings,—"would not any one say they were a couple of angels, to see them looking so handsome and smiling? They are coming in here, so I won't stay to interrupt them."

And Guillaume, still whistling the air he had begun, went up stairs to his own bedroom, taking care to whistle more softly as they approached nearer to the house, so that at the very moment he opened his bedroom door they appeared at the door which led into the sitting-room on the ground-floor.

But at the top of the staircase, where he paused for a moment so as to look at them as long as possible, he murmured,—

"Heaven bless you, my children. They don't hear me; so much the better; they are listening to another voice, which sings much more sweetly than mine."

Nor was Guillaume mistaken; that voice, whose accents did not reach him, but which he guessed, was the heavenly voice of youth and love, and the burden of its song from the lips of the two young people, was,—

"Will you always love me?" asked Catherine.

"Always!" was Bernard's reply.

"It is very strange," continued Catherine, "but that pro-

mise, which ought to fill my heart with delight, fills me, on the contrary, with a sadness I cannot express."

"Poor dear Catherine!" murmured Bernard in his gentlest tone of voice, "if I make you sad in telling you I love you, I don't know what I can say to cheer you."

"Bernard," continued the young girl, as if answering her own thought rather than her lover's remark, "your parents have been married six-and-twenty years, and, except a few little misunderstandings, which are of no moment in themselves, they live as happily as on the first day of their marriage. Every time I look at them I ask myself whether we shall be as happy as they are; and, more than all, whether we shall continue happy as long as they have."

"And why not?" asked Bernard.

"That is a question which I put to you myself," resumed Catherine; "but if I had a mother, it would be that mother, who, anxious for her daughter's happiness, would ask for me; but I have neither father nor mother; I am an orphan, and my whole happiness, like my whole love, is in your hands. Listen, Bernard; if you think it possible that you will some day love me less than you love me now, let us separate at once; it will kill me, I know, I feel sure; but if you were one day to love me less, or cease to love me altogether, oh! far, far sooner would I die while you still love me than wait until that day arrive."

"Look at me, Catherine," replied Bernard, "and you will find my answer written in my eyes."

"But have you tested yourself, Bernard? are you sure that it is not the friendship of a brother, but indeed the deep affection of a lover, that you have for me?"

"I have not tested myself, certainly," Bernard returned; "but you have tested me surely, Catherine!"

"I? In what way?"

"During those eighteen months' absence! Do you not think those eighteen months' separation a sufficient test? Except in those two short journeys I made to Paris and a few happy days since your departure, I have not lived, for that cannot be called living, when one's heart is far away, when one loves nothing,—takes pleasure in nothing,—when one is always ill-humoured and ill-tempered with everybody and everything. All who know me will tell you the same thing; my forest, the forest where I was born, those huge oaks with their whispering branches, those beautiful beeches, with their silver barks,—well, I have ceased taking any

pleasure in them. Formerly, when I left home in the early morning, in the voices of the birds which were just awaking and singing their hymns of praise and greeting, it was your voice I heard, Catherine! in the evening when I returned homeward, and when quitting my companions who followed the path, I plunged into the depths of the wood, there was something like a white phantom which seemed to beckon to me, which glided among the trees, which showed me the way, which disappeared as I approached my father's house, and which I found standing at the door awaiting my arrival. Since you left, Catherine, not a morning has passed, that I have not said, 'Where are the birds? they no longer sing as they once did;' and there has not been an evening, that, instead of reaching home, light-hearted, cheerful, and full of health and strength, I have not arrived the last of all, wearied, sad at heart, and fatigued in mind, as in body."

"Dear Bernard!" murmured Catherine, putting her face close to his for him to kiss.

"But since you have returned, Catherine," continued Bernard, with that youthful enthusiasm which is the attribute only of those early pulsations of a young and loving heart, of those early dreams of a warm imagination—"since you have returned, everything has changed. The birds have returned to the branches, my beautiful phantom is, I feel sure, waiting for me by the thicket yonder, to lure me from the path, and to guide me towards the house; and upon the threshold of this door—oh! upon this threshold I am certain to find once more, no longer the phantom of love, but the reality of happiness."

"My own Bernard, how fondly I love you!" cried Catherine.

"And then—and then—" continued Bernard, knitting his brows and passing his hand hurriedly across his forehead; "and then—but no, I will not speak to you of that."

"Speak to me of everything! tell me all! I must know all."

"And then, this morning, Catherine, when that fellow Mathieu showed me the Parisian's letter,—the letter in which that man spoke to *you*, my own Catherine, to *you*, to whom I speak as to the Holy Virgin—in which he spoke to you, my beautiful wood-lily, as he speaks to those girls and women who live in the town hard by—I felt such bitter pain and grief, that I thought I should have died: and at the same time, so wild a wrath, that I said to myself—"Before I die, at least I shall slay him!"

"Yes," said Catherine, in her most caressing tone of voice; "and that is why you went by the Goudreville road with your loaded gun, instead of quietly waiting for me here; that is why you walked six leagues in two hours and a half, at the risk of killing yourself from fatigue and the heat. But you have been punished, for you saw your own Catherine an hour later in consequence. True it is, that the innocent has been punished with the guilty, for your jealousy, dear Bernard, but——"

"Yes, yes, jealousy," said Bernard, setting his teeth hard; "that is the word. Oh! you do not know what jealousy is, Catherine."

"Yes, for a moment I too have been jealous," said Catherine laughing; "but be easy, I am not so any longer."

"Do you know," continued Bernard, putting his clenched fist to his forehead, "that if misfortune had so willed it that you had received that letter, and that, having received it, you had not altered your route; if, in fact, you had come by Villers-Cotterets, and had met that coxcomb—at the mere thought of such a thing, Catherine, my hand stretches involuntarily towards my gun, and——"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Catherine, terrified at the expression of the young man's face, and at the same moment as if she had seen an apparition.

"Why so?" asked the young man.

"There! there! there!" murmured Catherine, approaching her mouth close to Bernard's ear; "there—he is there, close by the door!"

"He!" exclaimed Bernard; "and what has he come here for?"

"Silence," said Catherine, pressing the young man's arm; "it was your mother herself who invited him to come, with Monsieur le Maire and Mademoiselle Euphrosyne. Bernard, he is your guest."

At this moment, a young man, fashionably dressed, wearing a frock-coat, a coloured neckerchief, and carrying a light cane in his hand, made his appearance at the open door, but seeing the two young people almost in each other's arms, he seemed uncertain whether to enter or to leave the room.

Just at this critical juncture, Bernard's look met his; the young keeper's eye flashed like lightning, and the Parisian understood, as by instinct, that he had fallen into the tiger's den.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Bernard," he said, "but I was looking for———"

"Yes," replied the latter; "and in looking, you have found what you were not looking for."

"Bernard!" said Catherine, in a whisper—"Bernard!"

"Be quiet!" said the young keeper, endeavouring to free himself from Catherine's grasp. "I have a few words to say to Monsieur Chollet; when I have said what I have to say, and when the question has been fully and plainly discussed between us, the matter will be at an end."

"Bernard!" persisted Catherine, "be calm, be cool."

"Do you be quiet, Catherine; let me but say a couple of words to this gentleman, or, as I live, I shall have four to say to him instead."

"Yes, yes, but———"

"I tell you again, Catherine, be quiet."

And with an impatient, almost violent gesture, which there was no misunderstanding, Bernard almost thrust Catherine towards the door.

The young girl could not fail to perceive that every moral or physical obstacle she might offer would but increase her lover's anger; she accordingly withdrew, clasping her hands entreatingly together, and looking at him in the most suppliant manner.

When the door leading to the kitchen was shut behind Catherine, the two young men were alone.

Bernard looked, to satisfy himself that the door was quite shut; and, not contented with a mere look, went to the door and tried the catch.

Then returning to the Parisian, he said,—

"I, too, sir, was looking after something, or, rather, after some one; but more fortunate than yourself, *that* some one I have found. I have been looking for you, Monsieur Chollet."

"For me?"

"Yes, you."

The young man smiled. As soon as a man attacked him, he was ready to answer and to meet him as a man.

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes."

"I do not think I am very difficult to find."

"Except, perhaps, when you set off early in the morning in your tilbury, in order to wait for the diligence from Paris on the Goudreville road."

The young man drew himself up, and with a smile, full of disdain, replied,—"I go out in the morning at whatever hour I choose, and I go in whatever direction I please. That is a matter which concerns no one but myself."

"You are perfectly right, monsieur; every man is free to do as he pleases; but there is one piece of truth which you will not, I trust, dispute, although it may come from me, any more than I do not presume to dispute anything which proceeds from you."

"And what may that be?"

"That every man is master of what belongs to him."

"I do not dispute that, Monsieur Bernard."

"Now, understand this, Monsieur Chollet: my property is my field, if I am a farmer renting land; it is my sheepfold, if I am raising sheep; it is my farm, if I am the owner and proprietor of it. Well, then, a wild-boar rushes out of the forest, and destroys my crops; I hunt him down keenly, and I kill the boar. A wolf steals out of the wood to strangle my sheep; I send a ball after the wolf, and the ball does the wolf's business. A fox makes his way into my farm, and slaughters my fowls; I catch the fox in a trap, and I smash his head with the heel of my boot. So long as the field was not my own; so long as the sheep did not belong to me; so long as the fowls were the property of other people, I had no pretention to claim such a right; but from the very moment that the field, the sheep, and the fowls, are mine—are mine I say, it is altogether different. Well, Monsieur Chollet, I have now the honour to inform you, that I only await the consent of my father and mother to marry Catherine; and that in a fortnight hence, Catherine will be my wife, my own wife, consequently my own property; which is as much as to say, "Let the wild-boar, who thinks of tearing up my field, look to it! Let the wolf, who is roaming round my sheep, look to it! Let the fox, who covets my fowls, look to it! So that, if you have any objections to make, do so now, Monsieur Chollet, do so at once. I am ready to listen to anything you may have to say."

"Unfortunately," replied the Parisian, who, brave as he was, was not, probably, sorry to be extricated from so awkward a situation—"unfortunately, you are not the only one listening to me."

"Not the only one?"

"No. Do you wish me to answer you before a woman and a priest?"

Bernard turned round and perceived the Abbé Grégoire and Catherine at the opened door.

"No," said he, "you are right. Silence!"

"In that case, I will postpone my answer until to-morrow. Will that suit you?" asked Chollet.

"To-morrow, be it; or the day after; when you like, where you like, and how you like."

"Nothing can be better."

"Bernard," interrupted Catherine, too delighted that the arrival of the good Abbé Grégoire had furnished her with an opportunity of interrupting the interview, "here is our dear Abbé Grégoire, whom we love so dearly, and whom I, at least, have not seen during the last eighteen months."

"Good-day, my children!" said the abbé.

The two young men exchanged a last look, which was equivalent to a mutual provocation; and while Louis Chollet withdrew, with a bow towards Catherine and the abbé, Bernard, with his face lighted up with pleasure, and a smile upon his lips, went up to the priest, and kissing his hand, said,—

"Welcome! welcome! man of peace, in this house, where every one wishes for nothing better than to live in peace."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ABBE GREGOIRE.

In the very simplest existences, events sometimes occur which seem almost providential. The sudden appearance of the Abbé Grégoire at the very moment when the two young men were probably upon the point of exchanging a mutual defiance was one of those events.

As it was a long walk for the kind-hearted abbé to undertake in order to pay a visit, between low mass and vespers, to the Maison-Neuve, where he had never been but once before; and as there was nothing to explain the abbé's presence there at that particular moment, Bernard, after having kissed his hand, looked up in his face, and laughingly said,—

"What have you come here for, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"I?"

"Yes. I will wager almost anything," continued Bernard, "that you have no idea what you have come here for, or rather, what you are going to do, now that you are here."

The abbé did not even attempt to guess the kind of enigma which had been submitted to him.

"Man proposes, and Heaven disposes," he replied. "I am ready for anything that Heaven pleases." And then he added, "As far, however, as I am personally concerned, all I intended was to pay your father a visit."

"Have you seen him?" asked Bernard.

"No, not yet," was the abbé's reply.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," continued Bernard, with a look fraught with tenderness at Catherine, while he still continued to address himself to the priest, "you are always welcome, but more welcome to-day than any other day."

"Yes, I guess," said the abbé, "because of the arrival of this dear child."

"Partly on that account, dear abbé, but, more than all, on account of something else."

"Well, my children," said the abbé, looking round for a chair, "you shall tell me all about it."

Bernard hastened to fetch a chair, and, placing it behind the priest, who, tired from his long walk, did not wait to be invited to sit down, said,—

"Will you kindly listen to what I have to say? I ought, perhaps, to make a long speech, but I prefer telling you the whole matter in a couple of words—Catherine and I wish to get married."

"Ah! ah! And you love Catherine, my boy?" inquired the Abbé Grégoire,

"Indeed, indeed I do."

"And you love Bernard, my child?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"But this is a confidence I think you should repose in your nearest relations."

"Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Bernard; "but you are the friend of my father, the confessor of my mother, the dear loved abbé of us all; well, do you talk of this to my father, who will talk of it to my mother. Try and get their consent, which I hope will not be very difficult to obtain, and you will see two young people very happy. There now," added Bernard, placing his hand on the abbé's shoulder, "I hear my father, coming out of his room. You know the redoubt that requires to be taken, and while you are taking it, Catherine and I will go and walk in the forest, singing your praises as we go along. Come, Catherine."

And, as light and joyous as birds, they ran towards the door, and through the door into the wood.

While this little scene was taking place, Guillaume had paused upon the landing; and the Abbé Grégoire, turning round towards him, nodded a recognition.

"I saw you coming along some way off," began Guillaume, "and I said to myself, 'It is the abbé, as I live; it is the abbé himself.' Only I could scarcely believe it. What a piece of luck, though, and this very day of all others! I will lay a wager that you came less for our sakes than to see Catherine."

"You are quite wrong, for I was not aware of her arrival."

"In that case, you are only the more delighted to find her here, are you not? Good gracious, how she has improved! You will stay to dinner, I hope? Ah! I give you fair warning, Monsieur l'Abbé, no one who enters my house to-day shall leave it untill two o'clock to-morrow morning."

And Guillaume descended the staircase, and approached the abbé, holding out both his hands in welcome.

"Two o'clock in the morning!" repeated the abbé; "why, I never did such a thing as go to bed at two o'clock in the *morning* in my life."

"Bah! what do you do when you have midnight mass, come?"

"How shall I get home?"

"Monsieur le Maire will take you home in his carriage."

The abbé shook his head.

"No, no," he said; "the mayor and I are not on very good terms."

"It's your own fault, then."

"How my fault?" asked the abbé, astonished that his old friend the keeper should suppose him to be in the wrong without any explanation.

"Yes, you have been unlucky enough to say in his presence, 'You shall not, knowingly, take or keep that which belongs to others.'"

"Well," resumed the abbé, "I do not say, even at the risk of having to return home on foot at night, that I will not join your party. Besides, I fancied, before I came here, that I might remain longer than I expected, and so I begged the curé to take my place at vespers."

"Bravo! you have put me into the best of humours, abbé."

"So much the better," said the latter, placing his arm within that of the head-keeper, "for I wanted to find you in that disposition."

"Me?" said Guillaume, in astonishment.

"Yes, for you are a great grumbler sometimes, you know."

"None of your nonsense, abbé."

"And to-day, particularly, I have——"

The abbé looked at Guillaume very significantly.

"What?" asked the keeper.

"Well to-day, I have in one way or another two or three things to ask you."

"Two or three things to ask me?"

"Well, suppose we say two, in order not to alarm you."

"For whom?"

"Besides, you ought to be accustomed to that, Guillaume; every time I hold out my hand to you, it is to say: 'My dear Monsieur Watrin, charity, if you please.'"

"Well, what is it? Come, out with it," said Guillaume laughing.

"In the first place, there is old Pierre."

"Ah! yes, poor devil! I know his piece of ill-luck. That scoundrel Mathieu has managed to get him sent away from Monsieur Raisin's."

"He has been in his service for twenty years, and because of a letter he lost the day before yesterday——"

"Monsieur Raisin was wrong," said Guillaume; "I told him so this morning, and you shall tell him the same thing when he comes back. People don't discharge old servants of twenty years' standing; a servant who has been in one man's service as long as that is almost a member of the family. For my own part, I wouldn't think of turning a dog away who had been ten years in my yard."

"Oh! I know your kind heart, Watrin, and so I set out on a little expedition early this morning, in order to make a collection for the poor fellow. Some gave me ten sous, others twenty; and then I thought of you, and I said to myself, 'I will go the Maison-Neuve on the Soissons road; it is a league and a half there, and a league and a half back again, that makes three leagues altogether; I will lay a tax upon Guillaume Watrin of twenty sous the league, and that will make three francs, without taking into account that I shall have the pleasure of shaking him by the hand.'"

"Heaven reward you, Monsieur l'Abbé, for you have indeed a noble heart."

And Guillaume thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew out two pieces of five francs each, which he gave to the Abbé Grégoire.

"Nay!" said the abbé; "ten francs—that is a good deal for your means, dear Monsieur Watrin."

"I ought to give something more than the others, since it was I who took so much notice of that treacherous-hearted fellow Mathieu, and since it was, in some measure, from my house that he started to work the mischief he has done."

"I would far sooner," said the abbé, turning the two pieces of five francs round and round with his fingers, as if he had a feeling of remorse in depriving his companion of such a sum—"I would far sooner that you only gave me three francs, or even nothing at all, and that you would allow him to pick up a little wood in that part of the forest you attend to."

Guillaume looked the abbé full in the face, and then, with an expression of honesty and simplicity combined, he said,—

"The wood belongs to his Highness the Duke of Orleans, my dear abbé, while the money is my own; so put the money in your pocket, but let Pierre take care not to touch the wood. And now, since that matter is settled, let us pass on to the other. Come, what is the next thing you have to ask me?"

"I am the bearer of a petition."

"For whom?"

"For you."

"A petition for me? That's a good idea! Let me see what it is?"

"It is a verbal one."

"Whom is this petition from?"

"From Bernard."

"What does he want?"

"He wants——"

"Well! finish."

"Well, then, he wants to get married."

"Oh! oh!" said Guillaume.

"Why do you say *Oh! oh!* Is he not old enough?" asked the Abbé Grégoire.

"Yes; but whom does he want to marry?"

"A good girl, whom he loves, and who loves him."

"Provided it is not Mademoiselle Euphrosyne he is in love with, he has my permission to choose any one he likes, for a wife, even if it were my grandmother."

"Don't make yourself uneasy, my good friend; Catherine is the woman he is in love with."

"Really and truly!" cried Guillaume delightedly; "Bernard loves Catherine, and Catherine loves him."

"Did you not suspect it?" inquired the abbé.

"I was afraid of being mistaken."

"You consent, then?"

"With the greatest pleasure in life!" exclaimed Watrin; but suddenly stopping, he added, "By the bye, you must speak to my old woman about it. Everything we have done for the last six-and-twenty years has been done together. Bernard is her son as much as he is mine; so the old lady must be consulted. Yes, yes," he continued, "we can't do without her."

And going to the kitchen-door, he called out,—

"Holla, Marianne! come here."

He then returned to where he had left the abbé, holding his pipe between his teeth, and rubbing his hands together, which with Guillaume was a sign of the intensest satisfaction:

"Ah! ah! that young rascal Bernard," he added; "it is about the wisest piece of folly he ever committed in his life."

At this moment, Madam Watrin appeared at the door of the kitchen, wiping her face with her white apron.

"Well, what is the matter?" she asked.

"Come here, and you shall know."

"What a stupid thing to disturb me, just as I was making the crust of my *pâté*."

Then, suddenly, as she perceived her unexpected guest, whom she had not hitherto observed, she exclaimed,—

"What! Monsieur l'Abbé Grégoire! Your servant, Monsieur l'Abbé. I had no idea you were here, or else there would have been no need to call me."

"There!" said Guillaume to the abbé, "do you hear? do you hear? She is off now."

"You are quite well, I hope?" continued Madame Watrin; "and your niece, Mademoiselle Alexandrine, too? You know how delighted everybody is in this house on account of Catherine's return."

"Yes, yes, yes! You will help me to put a martingale on her, Monsieur l'Abbé, if I can't manage her alone."

"Why did you call me, then," replied Marianne, with some remains of her recent effervescence of temper, "if you intended to prevent me paying my compliments to Monsieur l'Abbé, and asking after his niece?"

"I called you, because I wanted you to do me a pleasure."

"What is that?"

"That of giving me your opinion, in a few words, and without any phrases, upon an affair of importance. Bernard wants to marry."

"Bernard! marry! And with whom?"

"With his cousin."

"With Catherine?"

"With Catherine, yes. And now what is your opinion of it? Come, be quick."

"Catherine!" replied Madame Watrin; "she is a good girl, an excellent girl——"

"That's all right; go on."

"Who can't shame us in any way——"

"Go on, go on."

"Still, she has nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Wife, don't put in the balance a few miserable crown-pieces, when your children's happiness is at stake."

"But people can't get on well without money."

"But without love they get on still worse, you know."

"Ah, that's true."

"When we married, for instance," said Guillaume, "had we any money? No, we were as poor as a couple of rats, without reckoning that we are not very rich at the present day. Well, then, what would you have said if our parents had wished to separate us, under the pretext that we wanted a few hundred crowns, to set us up in housekeeping?"

"Yes, that's all well and good," replied his wife; "but that is not the principal obstacle."

And she pronounced these words in such a tone, as to make Guillaume understand, that if he fancied everything was finished he was very much mistaken, and that a fresh difficulty was about to be brought forward, as great as it was unexpected.

"Well," said Guillaume, nerving himself for the struggle; "now for this obstacle? What is it? Come, out with it."

"Oh, you understand me very well," said Marianne.

"Never mind," replied Guillaume, "go on just as if I didn't."

"Guillaume, Guillaume, we cannot take the responsibility of this marriage upon our consciences."

"Why so?"

"Why! because Catherine is a heretic."

"Ah! wife, wife," exclaimed Guillaume, stamping his foot on the ground; "I suspected that would be the stumbling-block, and yet I could hardly believe it."

"Can you wonder at it, man? I am the same to-day as I was twenty years ago. I opposed the marriage of her poor mother with Frederic Blum, as much as I possibly could. Unfortunately, she was your sister; she was free, and didn't need my consent; only I said to her, 'Rose, remember my prediction: your marriage with a heretic will bring down some misfortune upon your head.' She didn't or wouldn't listen to me, and my prediction was verified. The father was killed, the mother is dead, and the little girl was left an orphan."

"You are not going to reproach her with that?"

"No; but I reproach her with being a heretic."

"But, woman!" cried Guillaume, "do you really know what a heretic means?"

"A creature who will be damned."

"If she is an honest, honourable, good woman?"

"Yes, if she is all that!"

"If she be a good mother, a good wife, and a good daughter?"

"Yes, if she is all that, I say."

"If she possesses every virtue a woman *can* possess?"

"All the virtues in the world count as nothing, if she is a heretic."

"Ten thousand millions of oaths!" cried Guillaume.

"Swear as much as you like; but swearing won't change the matter."

"You're right, and so I wont meddle in it any more."

Then turning round towards the worthy priest, who had listened to the whole of this discussion without pronouncing a single word,—

"And now," he said, "Monsieur l'Abbé, you have heard all that has passed; it's my affair no longer; it's your turn to speak."

And rushing out of the room, like a man in a hurry to get into the fresh air, he exclaimed,—

"Oh! women! women! you have indeed been created and sent into this world to damn the whole human race."

But his wife, all this time, stood shaking her head, and muttering, as if she were speaking to herself,—

"No, it's no use talking; it's impossible. Bernard shall never marry a heretic. Anything else they like; but not that! No, not that, not that, certainly."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FATHER AND SON.

When Guillaume Watrin left the room, the Abbé Grégoire and Madame Watrin remained alone together.

The abbé as a matter of course accepted the mission which the old head-keeper had intrusted to him when he himself abandoned the field of battle, not as a man who has suffered defeat, but as a man who fears to be forced into the employment of arms, for the purpose of achieving success, of which he would be ashamed to avail himself.

Unfortunately, during the thirty years that Marianne had been his penitent, the Abbé Grégoire knew thoroughly well the character of the lady with whom he had to deal; and as the ruling passion of Madame Watrin was obstinacy, there was very little hope of succeeding in a case where Guillaume had failed. Consequently, in spite of his confident air, it was with a certain secret doubt that he approached the question.

"Dear Madame Watrin," he said, approaching Marianne, "have you no other objection to offer to this marriage than the difference of religious belief?"

"I! Monsieur l'Abbé?" she replied, "none; but it seems to me that *that* is quite enough."

"Come, come! Madame Watrin, in real truth, instead of saying no, you ought to say yes!"

"Oh! Monsieur l'Abbé," exclaimed Madame Watrin, raising her eyes to heaven, "do *you* drive me to give my consent to this marriage?"

"Indeed I do."

"Well, then, excuse me for saying so, but it is your duty rather to oppose it."

"*My* duty, dear Madame Watrin, is, in the narrow way in which I walk, to confer upon those who follow me, the greatest amount of happiness in my power; *my* duty is to console the wretched, and, above all, to try and make those happy who can become so."

"This marriage will destroy my child's soul; I refuse."

"Come, come, let us reason a little, dear Madame Watrin," persisted the abbé; "has not Catherine, although

she is a Protestant, always loved and respected you as a mother?"

"Oh! in that respect I have nothing to say; always, always, and it is only doing her justice to say so."

"She is kind, good, charitable?"

"She is all that."

"Pious, truthful, modest?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, dear Madame Watrin, make your conscience easy; the religion which teaches Catherine all these good qualities will not lose your son's soul."

"No, no, Monsieur l'Abbé it can't be," repeated Marianne, burying herself more and more in her blinded obstinacy.

"I beg of you," said the abbé.

"No!"

"I entreat you!"

"No, no, no!"

The abbé raised his eyes to heaven, and murmured,—

"Gracious Heaven! thou who art so kind, so pitiful, so merciful,—thou who hast but one look wherewith to judge men, thou seest into what an error this poor woman, who gives to her blindness the name of piety, has fallen,—have pity on and enlighten her."

But Marianne continued to shake her head in token of refusal.

At this moment Guillaume, who had doubtlessly been listening at the door, returned.

"Well! Monsieur l'Abbé," he asked, casting a side-glance at his wife, "has my old woman become a little more reasonable?"

"Madame Watrin will reflect, I hope," replied the abbé.

"Ah!" said Guillaume, shaking his head and doubling his fists.

His wife observed the gesture, but in her blinded obstinacy said,—

"Do as you like; I know you are the master; but if you marry them, it will be against my wish."

"Ten thousand devils! You hear her, Monsieur l'Abbé?" said Watrin.

"Patience, dear Monsieur Guillaume, patience," replied the abbé, seeing that the poor fellow was fast putting himself into a passion.

"Patience?" cried the old man; "why, the man who could be patient under such circumstances wouldn't be a man; he would be nothing better than a brute, hardly worth a charge of powder."

"Bah!" said the abbé, in an under-tone, "she has a good heart; be quiet, she will come round of her own accord."

"Yes, you're right; I don't wish her, now, to accept my opinion as if it were forced upon her; I don't intend her to fancy she can play the part of a despairing mother and a martyr wife. I will give her the whole day to reflect, and if this evening she does not of her own free will come and say to me, 'Well, old man, we must let the children marry——' "

Guillaume gave a side-glance at his wife, who merely shook her head, a movement which redoubled the keeper's exasperation.

"If she don't come and say that to me," he continued,—"why, listen to what I am going to say, Monsieur l'Abbé. It is now six-and-twenty years, since we have been married—yes, six-and-twenty years on the 15th of next June,—well, Monsieur l'Abbé, upon my word of honour, I will separate from her, as if it had been only an affair of yesterday, and we will finish the few days we may have still to live apart, she on her own side and I on mine."

"What does he say?" cried the old woman.

"Monsieur Watrin!" said the abbé.

"I say what I mean! Do you understand me, wife?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. Oh! what a wretched woman I am!"

And Madame Watrin burst into tears, and ran out of the room into the kitchen, but, great as her despair seemed to be, and as it was in reality, without making a single step towards a reconciliation.

When left together, the head-keeper and the abbé looked ruefully at each other. The abbé was the first to break the silence.

"Come, come, my dear Guillaume," he said, "courage, and, above all, coolness."

"But did you ever see such a thing?" Watrin cried in a fury: "did you ever see anything like it?"

"I still have strong hopes," replied the abbé, but evidently more with a view to console the poor man than from conviction; "the children must see her, and must talk to her."

"She shall not see them nor speak to them. It shall never be said that she has been good and kind from mere pity;

no, she shall be good from good feelings alone, or I will have nothing more to do with her. What! the children see her! the children talk to her! No! I should be ashamed of her! And I don't want them to know they have such a fool for their mother."

At this moment the anxious-looking face of Bernard peered through the half-opened door; Guillaume perceived him, and turning round to the abbé, said,—

"Not a word about that old obstinate woman, Monsieur l'Abbé, I beg."

Bernard had noticed his father's look, and the silence which the latter maintained did not diminish the young man's uneasiness.

"Well, father?" he at last said, in a timid voice.

"Who called you?" said Guillaume.

"Father!" murmured Bernard, almost imploringly.

The tone of his son's voice went through Watrin, but he steeled his heart, and in a voice as hard and dry as that of Bernard's was persuasive, he repeated,—

"I ask again, who called you? tell me."

"No one, I know; but I hoped——"

"Be off; you're a fool for hoping."

"Father! my dear, kind father!" said Bernard, "only one word, only one."

"Be off with you."

"For the love of Heaven, father."

"Go away, I say!" again cried Guillaume. "There is nothing for you to do here."

But the Watrin family was like the Orgon family, each member of it had his and her own dose of obstinacy. Instead of allowing the cloud which darkened his father's brow to disappear, and of returning later as the latter advised him to do, though somewhat harshly perhaps, Bernard strode into the room, and, persisting in questioning his father, said, in a firmer voice,—

"Father, my mother is weeping, and don't say a word; the tears are in your own eyes, and you drive me away——"

"You're wrong; my eyes have no tears in them."

"Be calm, Bernard, be calm!" said the abbé; "things may change."

But instead of listening to the voice of the abbé, Bernard listened rather to the voice of despair which was beginning to mutter threateningly within him.

"I am indeed miserable!" he said, fancying that his

mother consented to the marriage, and that it was his father who opposed it. "For five-and-twenty years I have loved my father, and my father loves me not."

"Miserable! yes, you are indeed miserable," exclaimed the abbé, "for you are speaking blasphemy."

"But you see my father does not love me, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Bernard, "since he refuses me the only thing which can make me happy."

"You hear him?" exclaimed Guillaume, working himself into a passion rather from his own wrathful feelings than from any fresh cause of anger; "that is the way these young people judge one."

"But," continued Bernard, "it shall never be said that, out of obedience to some incredible caprice, I abandon the poor girl; if she has only one friend here, that friend will at least replace all the others."

"I've already told you three times, Bernard, to be off!" cried Guillaume.

"I am going," said the young man; "but I am five-and-twenty years of age; moreover, I am free to do as I please, and what is refused me so cruelly, the law gives me a right to take, and take it I will."

"The law!" cried Guillaume, almost beside himself with passion; "can I believe my ears, that a son threatens his own father to his face with the law?"

"Is it my fault?"

"The law!"

"You drive me to it."

"The law! Out of this house! The law, to your father! Leave this place, and never appear again before me! The law!"

"Father," said Bernard, "I will go, since you drive me away; but remember the hour when you told your son to leave your house, and may all that happens fall upon your head!"

And Bernard, snatching up his gun, darted out of the house like a madman. Guillaume was on the point of catching up his own, when the abbé stopped him.

"What are you doing, Monsieur l'Abbé?" cried the old man. "Did you not hear what that wretch just now said."

"Father, father!" murmured the abbé, "you have been too hard upon your son."

"Too hard!" exclaimed Guillaume; "you, too. Is it I

who have been too hard, or the boy's mother? You and Heaven know well which it is! Too hard! when my eyes were full of tears when I spoke to him; for I love him, or rather loved him, as a father loves an only child. But now," continued the old keeper in a broken voice, "let him go where he likes, provided he goes away altogether; and let him do what he can, provided I see him no more."

"Injustice begets injustice, Guillaume," said the abbé solemnly. "Take care! after having been hard in your anger, to be unjust when the passions of your heart are at rest is still worse. Heaven has already forgiven you your anger and passion, but will not forgive you your injustice."

The abbé had scarcely finished, when Catherine, in her turn, pale and wild with affright, entered the room. Her large blue eyes were fixed in their gaze, and heavy tears, like pearls falling from them, rolled down her cheeks.

"Dearest father!" she said, looking in terror at the saddened expression of the abbé's face, and the gloomy countenance of the keeper; "what is the matter—what has happened?"

"Ah! here 's the other now!" muttered Guillaume, taking the pipe out of his mouth and putting it into his pocket, which was an invariable sign with him of extreme emotion.

"Bernard kissed me three times, weeping bitterly all the while," continued Catherine; "he took his hat and his hunting-knife, and started off, running as if he were mad."

The abbé turned aside and wiped his streaming eyes with his handkerchief.

"Bernard—Bernard is a miserable fellow," replied Guillaume, "and you—you——"

In all probability he was on the point of confounding Catherine in the malediction he had pronounced upon his son, when his irritated look met the gentle and supplicating glance of the young girl, and the remains of his anger melted away like snow under an April sunbeam.

"And you—you," he murmured—"you, Catherine, are a dear, good girl! Kiss me, my child." Then, gently pushing his niece aside, he turned towards the abbé—"Monsieur Grégoire," he said, "it is quite true—I have been hard; but, you see, it was the mother's fault. Go and try and make the matter straight with her. As for me, I shall go and take a turn in the forest; for I have always found that the shade and solitude of the trees are full of good counsel." And grasping the abbé's hand, but without venturing to look

towards Catherine, he quitted the house, crossed the road in a diagonal direction, and plunged into the copse opposite.

The abbé, in order to avoid an explanation with Catherine, would have liked to have done the same, and with that object he was proceeding towards the kitchen, a place where he was almost sure to find Madame Watrin, whatever her state of despair might be, when Catherine stopped him.

"In Heaven's name, Monsieur l'Abbé, have pity on me," she said, "and tell me all that has passed here."

"My child," replied the worthy old priest, taking both the young girl's hands in his own, "you are so good, so pious, so devoted, that you can have none but friends here below, as well as in Heaven above. Live still in hope, therefore—accuse no one, and leave to the goodness of Heaven, to the prayers of its angels, and to the affection of your parents, the care of arranging matters."

"But what can I do?" asked Catherine.

"Pray that a father and son, who have left each other in anger and tears, may meet again with forgiveness and in joy."

And leaving Catherine somewhat calmer, if not more reassured, he entered into the kitchen, where Madame Watrin, still shaking her head, and repeating "*No! no! no!*" weeping all the time, was skinning her rabbits, and rolling out the crust for the pie.

Catherine watched the Abbé Grégoire withdraw from the the room, just as a few moments previously she had watched her adopted father, comprehending, however, the recommendation of the one just as clearly as she did the silence of the other.

"Oh, Heavens!" she exclaimed, "will no one tell me what has happened here?"

"Yes, I will, with your leave, Mademoiselle Catherine," said Mathieu, appearing suddenly leaning on the sill of the window.

Mathieu's sudden appearance was almost a delight for Catherine. Coming, in some respect, in Bernard's name, and to give her news of Bernard, the vagabond, hideous as he was, scarcely seemed more than merely ordinary-looking.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried the young girl; "tell me where Bernard is, and why he has gone away."

"Bernard?"

"Yes, yes, my dear Mathieu, tell me—I am listening."

"Well, he has gone away—eh! eh! eh!"

Mathieu began to laugh in his usual coarse manner, while Catherine bent forward, listening to him anxiously.

"He has gone off," he resumed; "but must I tell you why?"

"Yes—since I implore you to do so."

"Well, then, he has gone off because Monsieur Watrin drove him away."

"Driven away! The father drive the son away!—and why?"

"Why! Because he wished to marry you in spite of every one."

"Driven away! On my account driven away from his father's house!"

"Yes, I should think so, indeed!—there was some very strong language used. You see, I was in the bakehouse, and heard everything that passed—oh! without listening—I didn't listen, of course; but they talked so loud that I couldn't help hearing. There was one moment, too, when Monsieur Bernard said to his father, 'Upon your head will fall all the misfortunes that will be sure to happen,' that I thought the old man was going to snatch up his gun. Ah! and there would have been some mischief done, too; for Guillaume Watrin is not like me, for I can't put a ball into a street-door at five-and-twenty paces."

"Good Heavens! poor dear Bernard!"

"Ah! indeed, the risk he has run for you well deserves his seeing you again, even if it were only to prevent him committing some stupid action or other."

"Oh! yes, yes! there is nothing I ask better than to see him again; but how?"

"He will be expecting you this evening."

"Expecting me?"

"Yes, that's what I was told to tell you."

"By whom?"

"By whom, do you say? by him, of course."

"And where will he expect me?"

"At the Prince's Fountain."

"At what time?"

"At nine o'clock."

"I will be there, Mathieu, I will be there."

"Don't fail."

"I shall be sure not to fail."

"If you do, I shall catch it, for Master Bernard is not over-tender, I can tell you. This morning, even, he gave me a slap on the face, from which my cheek still smarts;

but I'm not a bad sort of fellow, after all, for I don't bear any ill-will."

"Be easy, my good Mathieu," said Catherine, as she ascended the stairs to her bedroom, "for Heaven will reward you."

"I hope so, sincerely," said Mathieu, as he looked after the young girl until the door was closed after her.

And then, with the smile of a fiend, who sees a poor innocent creature fall into his snare, he returned to the forest, which he entered with long, hurried strides, and making signs as he went along. At these signs a young man on horseback, who had halted at a little distance, trotted forward.

"Well?" he asked Mathieu, checking his horse when he arrived opposite to him.

"Well! everything is going on admirably. The other one has made such a fool of himself in various ways, that it seems she has had enough of him; and then, she begins to regret Paris."

"What ought I to do?"

"What ought you to do?"

"Yes."

"Will you do it?"

"Certainly."

"Well! go back as fast as you can to Villers-Cotterets, cram your pockets full of money. At eight o'clock, be at the *fête* of Corcy; and at nine——"

"Well! at nine?"

"Some one who wasn't able to speak to you this morning, some one who didn't come back by way of Goudreville, merely from fear of getting talked about, will be waiting for you at the Prince's Fountain."

"Does she consent to go off with me, then?" exclaimed the Parisian delightedly.

"She consents to everything," was Mathieu's reply.

"Mathieu," returned the young man, "here are five-and-twenty louis for you if you have told me the truth. At nine o'clock this evening, then."

And plunging his spurs into the horse's flanks, he set off at a gallop in the direction of Villers-Cotterets.

"Five-and-twenty louis?" murmured Mathieu, looking at him as he disappeared through the trees; "that's not a bad sum, without including a little bit of revenge into the bargain! Ah! I am a screech-owl, am I? The screech-owl is a bird of bad omen, Monsieur Bernard; so the screech-owl wishes you a very good evening."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE VILLAGE FETE.

FIVE-AND-TWENTY years ago, that is to say, at the period when the events we have undertaken to relate took place, the *fêtes* of the various villages situated in the vicinity of Villers-Cotterets were real *fêtes*, not only for the villages themselves, but also for the town from which these villages radiated, as satellites from their planet.

It was particularly at the commencement of the year, and when the earliest *fêtes* are coincident with the first fine days of spring, when, beneath the warm rays of a May sun, one of these villages suddenly raises itself, chattering and singing from the shelter of its leafy covert, like a nest of merry warblers or of tomtits newly-hatched;—it was particularly at such a moment, we say, that the *fête* presented a new charm, a double attraction.

It happened, consequently, that during the previous fortnight in the village, and during the previous week in the town, all those who had a motive in looking forward to the *fête*, whether arising from interest, or from speculation or pleasure, were busily engaged in making the most extensive preparations for it, whereof coquetry was the prime instigator.

The inns polished their tables, cleaned their stone floors, scoured their tin drinking-mugs, and hung fresh bushes over their doors.

The fiddlers swept, mowed, and trod down the grass on which the dancers were to amuse themselves.

The drinking-booths were pitched under the trees, like the tents, not of a battle-field, but of an encampment of pleasure.

And, lastly, young men and young girls prepared their best clothes for the occasion, just as, previously to a grand review, the soldiers who are to take a part in it burnish their arms in readiness.

On the morning of that famous day every one awoke early, and was busy, occupied, and restlessly doing something from the very dawn.

The roundabouts fixed their rotatory mechanism; the *ships* and carriages, which were destined to carry their living

cargoes through the air, were moored to the ground as firmly as possible upon their four rickety feet; the plaster figures, destined to be broken by the missiles of the crossbows, were impaled in rows; the frightened rabbits awaited in deep dejection, with their ears drawn back, the hour when the ring, destined to be carried off upon the point of the lance, would dispose of their fate, and transfer them from the basket of the speculator to the stew-pot of the winner.

For the village, therefore, the *fête* was a *fête* from the earliest hour in the morning.

It was different, however, for those who proceeded from the town to the *fête*, and who did not start until three or four o'clock in the afternoon, unless private invitations, or family connections with the farmers or the principal inhabitants of the village, induced them to change their ordinary habits.

Towards three or four o'clock in the afternoon, according as the village was nearer or more distant from the town, a lengthened procession began to wind its way along the road.

It was composed of members of the fashionable class on horseback, of the aristocratic portion in carriages, and of those who belonged to the third estate on foot.

These members of the third estate were clerks of notaries and others similarly employed, as well as the better class of workmen, each having under his arm a pretty girl, wearing a cap trimmed with pink or blue ribbons, caring little, as she tripped merrily along in her jaconet or printed cotton dress, with her bright eyes and dazzling teeth, for the lady in a bonnet who drove haughtily by in her carriage close to her.

At five o'clock every one was at the rendezvous, and the *fête* realized its true signification, composed as it was of its three constituent elements: aristocrats, middle class, and peasants.

Every one danced within the same precincts, it is true, but yet without mixing with one another; each class formed its quadrille to itself; and if any one of those quadrilles was worthy of being envied, and was really envied, it was that in which the grisettes with the pink and blue ribbons were dancing.

At nine o'clock in the evening the dances began to be less numerously attended; all who lived in the town retraced their steps towards home, the aristocrats in their carriages, the clerks, workmen, and grisettes on foot.

There were long, lingering partings under the shadows of the huge tree, beneath the filtered rays of the young moon,

in the warm breath of the spring of the year, which were truly delightful.

These *fêtes* were in greater or less request according to the importance of the villages or the picturesqueness of their situation.

In this latter respect, Corcy was entitled to be placed in the first rank.

Nothing could be more graceful than this little village, situated at the entrance of the valley of Nadon, and forming a sharp angle with the lakes of la Ramée and Javage.

Within ten minutes' walk of the road leading to Corcy is a spot different in character to any other, for it is peaceful and wild at the same time; it is known as the Prince's Fountain.

It will be remembered that it was close to this fountain that Mathieu had given his double rendezvous to the Parisian and to Catherine.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, therefore, the festivities were at their height.

We are about to transport our readers, not precisely into the midst of the *fête*, but to the door of one of those improvised wineshops which we spoke of a little while ago.

This particular wine shop, which sprang every year, for a period of three days, into a new and ephemeral existence, was an old abandoned keeper's lodge, and had, in consequence, remained closed for three hundred and sixty days every year.

During the three days of the *fête*, the inspector placed this house at the disposition of a good, respectable woman of the name of Tellier, who kept a wineshop at Corcy, and who made a kind of branch establishment of this place.

The *fête*, we have explained, lasted three days. Of the five days we have deducted from the year, the first was the eve, the last the morrow; that is to say, the first represented the preparation for the *fête*, and the last the time needed to restore matters to their ordinary condition.

As long as the *fête* lasted, the wineshop lived, drank, sang; it seemed as if its duration and vitality were eternal.

Yet afterwards, when it was shut up for the three hundred and sixty remaining days, during the whole of which period it remained silent, gloomy, asleep, in a state of lethargy, it seemed as if it were dead.

It was situated half-way between Corcy and the Prince's Fountain, so that it offered a very natural halting-place for *those* who were going to the fountain.

And in the interval of the country dances, owing to the loveliness of its situation, and the desire for solitude so natural to lovers, there were few who, passing from the village to the fountain, did not stop at Madame Tellier's litttle road-side inn to drink a glass of wine, and to eat some custards of her own manufacture.

About five, six, and seven o'clock, the temporary establishment of Madame Tellier was at the apogee of its splendour; then by degrees its visitors withdrew, it became more and more deserted, and generally towards ten o'clock at night it closed its wooden eyelids, and slept under the guardianship of a young girl named Babet, who took Madame Tellier's place, and was honoured with her entire confidence.

At early dawn the next day it opened, first of all its door, then, one after the other, its two shutters, and then, like the preceding day, boldly awaited the arrival of its customers.

These customers preferred to establish themselves under a kind of rustic arbour, which was formed outside the house by the united efforts of the ivy, vines, and other climbers, that wound their way up the pillars which supported this species of capacious summer-house.

Opposite to this summer-house, at the foot of a huge beech, the giant of another age, which seemed as if it were surrounded by its children, was erected a little shed of green boughs, where the wine was kept cool during the day, being taken into the house in the evening, for Madame Tellier's confidence in the sobriety and probity of her neighbours was not such as to allow her to leave the tempting liquid to pass the night in the open air.

In this way, towards seven in the evening, at the same moment that the actual locality of the *fête* itself presented the most animated appearance, Madame Tellier's branch establishment rejoiced in a meeting of the liveliest character.

It was composed of those who drank wine, at ten, twelve, and fifteen sous a bottle, for Madame Tellier had three prices, besides customers for her creams, custards, and frangipane tarts.

Some, even, more hungry than others, went so far as to order an omelette, a salad, or a sausage.

Five tables out of every six were filled, and Madame Tellier and Mademoiselle Babet were scarcely sufficient to answer the frequent appeals of the customers.

At one of these tables were seated two of the keepers, who had been present in the morning when the boar, which

had been tracked to its lair by our friend François, was killed.

These two foresters were Bobineau and Lajeunesse.

Bobineau, a bright-eyed, stout, good-humoured, florid-looking, light-hearted, full-faced fellow, a native of Aix, in Provence, who passed his life in playing tricks upon others and having tricks played upon himself, speaking thickly like a true Provençal as he was, full of spirit in attack as in defence, and in both cases making use of words and phrases which are still quoted in the district, although he has been dead for the last fifteen years.

Lajeunesse, a tall, thin, meagre-looking man, baptized with that juvenile name in 1784, by the Duke of Orleans (otherwise known as Philippe Egalité), because at that date he was the youngest of the foresters, had retained this nick-name all his life, although he had lived to become almost the oldest; he was as grave as Bobineau was gay, and as chary of his words as Bobineau was prodigal of his.

To the left of the house, looking towards the east, was the remains of a hedge, which had formerly been carried along so as to form a kind of square enclosure round the house, but which, at the date of our story, did not extend farther than the little green shed we have just spoken of, where the wine was kept to cool, and beyond which it disappeared, leaving the front of the house perfectly open.

Behind this hedge, through which an entrance was formed by a door, whereof the solid part was absent, the two uprights being alone left, was a kind of mound crowned by a large oak tree with moss-covered roots, and overlooking the little valley in which the Prince's Fountain had its source.

At the foot of this little mound, and on the further side of the hedge, Mathieu was playing at skittles, we were going to say, with three or four scape-graces like himself, but ought rather to say unlike himself, for scape-graces of his peculiar complexion of character were scarce enough to make such a collection a matter of some difficulty.

More distant still, beneath the mysterious shades of the forest, upon that carpet of moss-covered turf which deadened the foot-steps, the solitary or lovingly-united promenaders passed to and fro, indistinctly visible in the twilight which began slowly to close in.

As an accompaniment to the voices of the drinkers, eaters, players at skittles, and promenaders, the music of the violins *and* clarionette was heard almost continuously, ceasing only

just a sufficient time to enable the cavaliers to conduct their partners to their seats, choose others in their stead, and take their places for a fresh dance.

And now that our curtain has risen, and that the disposition of the scene is made somewhat comprehensible by our explanation, let us conduct our readers back again to the exterior of Madame Tellier's wineshop, who was occupied at that moment in serving a sybarite, who had ordered a bacon omelette and wine at twelve sous the bottle, while Babet was placing before Bobineau and Lajeunesse a piece of cheese, about the size of a brick, to help them to finish their second bottle of wine.

"Well, then, this is what it is," said Lajeunesse to Bobineau, with his usual grave air, while Bobineau, leaning backwards in his chair as much as the other was leaning forward, listened to him with an expression of comical interest; "and if you doubt it, you will be able to see him with your own eyes. When I say own, you understand it is a mere way of expressing myself. The fellow I speak of is a new arrival altogether; he comes from Germany, from the country of Catherine's father, and his name is Mildet."

"And where is the youngster going to live?" asked Bobineau, with that delicious Provençal accent we have already stated to be peculiar to him.

"At the other end of the forest, at Montaigne; he has a little carbine not higher than that; the barrel about fifteen inches long, a bore carrying about thirty shots to the pound, with balls like buck-shot. He takes a horse-shoe, nails it against the wall, and, at fifty paces, places, one after the other, a ball in each of the holes."

"The devil!" said Bobineau, laughing; "and pierces the wall too, I suppose. Why didn't he get made a farrier? he wouldn't have been afraid of a horse's kick in that case. When I see him do it I shall believe it, shan't I, Molicar?"

This remark was addressed to a new comer, who, after having stumbled over Mathieu's bowls, entered, accompanied by the maledictions of the players, who threatened to bowl at his legs, which were very unsteady, as a supplement to their own game.

At the sound of his own name, the disciple of Bacchus, as it was still the fashion at that period to entitle those overcome by excess, in other words M. Molicar himself, turned round, and recognizing, as through a fog, the person who had addressed him,—

"Ah!" he muttered, opening his eyes very wide, and rounding his mouth; "is that you, Bobineau?"

"Yes."

"And you were saying—just tell me what you were saying; you will do me a pleasure."

"Nothing—mere nonsense; it was that droll fellow Lajeunesse who made me say what I did."

"But," said Lajeunesse, whose vanity was hurt at having been stopped in his story, "when I tell you——"

"By the bye, Molicar," said Bobineau, interrupting him, "what has become of your law proceedings with your neighbour Lafarge?"

"My law proceedings?" asked Molicar, who, in the somewhat confused state of mind under which he was suffering, had same trouble in jumping from one idea to another.

"Yes."

"With Lafarge, the barber?"

"Yes."

"I have lost it."

"How was that?"

"I lost it because the judgment was against me."

"Who gave it?"

"Monsieur Basinot, the justice of the peace."

"And what was the judgment?"

"I was ordered to pay three francs fine."

"What did you do to Lafarge the barber?" asked Lajeuness very seriously."

"What did I do to him?" said Molicar, balancing himself on his legs like the pendulum of a clock. "I damaged his nose for him, but really without intending to do him any harm. You know Lafarge's nose very well, don't you, Bobineau?"

"First of all, let us be correct in our expression," said the cheery Provençal; "it isn't a nose, it's a handle."

"He's right! he's hit upon the very word. What a devil of a fellow Bobine is—no, I mean Bobineau—it's my tongue that trips me up."

"Well?" said Bobineau.

"Well! what?" asked Molicar, in his turn; for he was already a hundred miles from the conversation.

"He is waiting for the history of Lafarge's nose."

"True, true! It's exactly a fortnight ago," continued Molicar, making prodigious efforts to drive away a fly which

had no existence except in his own imagination; "we were coming out of the wine-shop together."

"You were tipsy, then," said Bobineau.

"No, upon my honour," replied Molicar.

"I say you were tipsy."

"And I say we weren't; for we were drunk as owls!" said Molicar, bursting into a loud laugh, for he too had hit upon the word he wanted.

"All right!" said Bobineau.

"You will never get better, I see," observed Lajeunesse.

"Of what?"

"Of getting drunk."

"And why should I?"

"The fellow reasons well," said Bobineau; "a glass of wine, Molicar?"

Molicar shook his head.

"What! you refuse?"

"Yes."

"*You* refuse a glass of wine?"

"Two, or none at all."

"Bravo!"

"Why two?" asked Lajeunesse, whose mind, more mathematical than that of Bobineau, required a positive solution of everything.

"Because only one," said Molicar, "will make the thirteenth this evening; and thirteen glasses of wine will bring me ill-luck."

"You're superstitious, then—nonsense! but go on, you shall have two glasses."

"We were coming out of the wine-shop," continued Molicar, replying to Bobineau's invitation.

"What time was it?"

"Oh, early."

"Well?"

"It might be one, or half-past one, in the morning; I wanted to go home, as became an honest man, who has three wives and a child."

"Three wives and a child!"

"What a pacha!"

"Eh? no, no; a wife and three children, How stupid this fellow Bobineau is. How can one have three wives? If I had had three wives, I should not have gone home at all. I very often don't go home because I have only one. Well, suddenly, an absurd idea struck me, to tell Lafarge the

barber, who lives upon the Place de la Fontaine, while I, as you know, live at the end of the Rue de Larguy ;—I say an absurd idea suddenly struck me, to say to him, 'Neighbour, let us see each other home. You shall take me home first, and then I will take you home; after that it will be your turn, and then mine; and every time we will pull up at Mother Moreau's shop, to have a glass together.'—'Ah!' said he, 'that's a good idea.'"

"Yes," observed Bobineau; "probably, like to-day, you had only taken thirteen glasses, and were afraid it would bring you ill-luck."

"No; on that day I hadn't counted them at all, and that was wrong; but I'll take care it shan't happen again. We were going along together, like a couple of good friends, like two good neighbours, when, on reaching Mademoiselle Chapuis's door, the post-office mistress—you know her, don't you?"

"Yes."

"There was a big stone; it was quite dark,—your eyes are good, aren't they, Lajeunesse? and yours, too, Bobineau? Well, the night was so dark, that you would have mistaken a cat for one of the forest-keepers."

"Not at all likely," said Lajeunesse gravely.

"Not at all likely! Do you say not at all likely?"

"No, he said nothing at all."

"If he said nothing at all, that's quite a different matter, and it's I who am wrong."

"Yes, you're wrong; so go on."

"Well, then, when I arrived at Mademoiselle Chapuis's door, the post-office mistress, you know, I met the stone. Like my usual luck, I didn't see it. How could I see it? My neighbour, Lafarge, didn't see his own nose, which is far closer to his eyes than my eyes were to the stone. I stumbled—I stretched out my hand—I caught hold of what I could,—and that happened to be neighbour Lafarge's nose. Well, you know that when a man is drowning in the water, he holds tight to whatever he catches hold of, and when he is drowning in wine, it is worse still. The effect was exactly the same as when you draw your knife from its sheath, Bobineau; neighbour Lafarge drew his nose out of my hand, but the skin of his nose remained *in* my hand. You see there was no fault of mine; especially as I didn't refuse, for a moment, to give it him back. Would you believe that the justice of the peace condemned me to pay a fine of three francs for that affair?"

"And was Lafarge mean enough to take the three francs?"

"Yes; but we have just been playing them out at bowls. I won them back, and we drank them out together. Now for my fourteenth glass, Bobineau."

"I say, Bobineau," said Mathieu, interrupting his temporary companions, "didn't you say you were looking for the inspector?"

"No," replied Bobineau.

"I fancied you did, and as he is coming this way, I thought it best to tell you of it, to save you the trouble of looking for him."

"In that case," said Lajeunesse, putting his hand into his pocket.

"What are you doing?" said Bobineau.

"I am going to pay for both. You will pay another time; it will be far better that the inspector should not see us sitting in a wine-shop; for a glass of wine, which a man may take now and then, he will fancy he makes a habit of taking always. It is thirty-four sous, isn't it, Madame Tellier?"

"Yes, gentlemen," said Madame Tellier.

"Here they are, then, and good-bye."

"Oh! the cowards," said Molicar, sitting down at the table they had just left, and holding up to the light a third bottle of wine which had scarcely been touched—"the cowards! to leave a field of battle when there are any enemies left!"

And, filling the two glasses to the brim, he touched the one against the other, and said,—

"Your health, Molicar."

During this time the two keepers, although anxious to get away as fast as possible, had suddenly stopped, and looked with stupefaction at another person who had just entered upon the scene.

This new comer was Bernard, but Bernard pale, excited, his neckerchief unfastened, and his face bathed in perspiration.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SERPENT.

THE young man was so altered, that for a moment his two comrades could hardly recognize him.

At last Lajeunesse said,—

"Why, it 's Bernard! How are you, Bernard?"

"Good-day!" replied Bernard, sharply, visibly annoyed at seeing them there.

"So you have come here, after all, have you?" Bobineau ventured to remark.

"Why not? Is there any law to prevent a man coming to the *fête* when he wants to amuse himself?"

"Oh! I don't say there 's anything against it," returned Bobineau; "only I am surprised to see you alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"And who do you think should be with me?"

"Why, it seems to me, that when a man is engaged, and engaged to a young and pretty girl——"

"Don't talk about that," said Bernard, knitting his brows. And then knocking the butt-end of his gun upon the table, he called out,—

"Some wine, here!"

"Hush!" said Lajeunesse.

"Why hush!"

"The inspector is here."

"Well, what then?"

"I only say, take care, for the inspector is here, that 's all."

"Well! what does it matter to me whether the inspector is here or not?"

"Oh! oh! in that case it 's quite a different affair."

"There 's something wrong at home," said Bobineau to Lajeunesse, touching his arm.

Lajeunesse made a sign to his companion that he was of the same opinion; and then, turning round to Bernard, he continued,—

"Come, Bernard, I didn't intend in what I said to you to put you out, or to be disagreeable to you; but, you know the inspector don't like to see us at the wineshop."

"And suppose I like to go there?" replied Bernard. "Do you fancy the inspector is to prevent me doing what I choose?" and, striking his gun a second time upon the table with greater violence than before, he called out, "Some wine, some wine, I say!"

The two keepers perceived that his mind was made up.

"Come along," said Bobineau; "it's no good standing between a fool and his folly."

"It's useless talking any more," said Lajeunesse. "Good-bye, Bernard!"

"Good-bye!" replied the latter, in a harsh, hard voice. "Good-bye!"

The two keepers moved off in an opposite direction to that by which the inspector was approaching, who, being besides, absorbed in conversation, and very near-sighted, passed close to the wine-shop without seeing the two keepers or Bernard.

"Is no one coming?" cried Bernard, giving the table so tremendous a blow with the butt-end of his gun that it was almost broken in pieces.

Madame Tellier ran forward, carrying a bottle in each hand, and without as yet knowing who was the impatient customer who called for wine with so much violence.

"Coming, coming!" she said. "Our stock of wine in bottles is out, and I was obliged to draw some from the cask."

And only then recognizing who it was who had summoned her, she exclaimed,—

"Oh! is that you, dear Monsieur Bernard? Good Heavens! how pale you are."

"Do you think so?" said the young man; "well, that's the reason I want something to drink: wine gives a colour, you know."

"But you're not well, Monsieur Bernard," persisted Madame Tellier.

Bernard shrugged his shoulders, and snatched one of the bottles out of her hand, saying,—

"Give it me;" and putting the bottle to his lips, he drank as much as he could without stopping.

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed the good creature, looking almost stupefied at seeing Bernard doing that which was so contrary to his usual habits; "you will make yourself ill, my boy."

"All right!" said Bernard, sitting down and putting down

the bottle violently upon the table. "Let me drink this; for who knows whether you will ever serve me another."

Madame Tellier's amazement increased more and more every moment; she neglected her other customers, to attend to the young man herself.

"But what has happened, dear Monsieur Bernard?"

"Nothing; only give me a pen, ink, and paper."

"A pen, ink, and paper?"

"Yes; be quick."

Madame Tellier hurried to obey him.

"A pen, ink, and paper," repeated Molicar, getting more and more intoxicated as he finished the third bottle, which Lajeunesse and Bobineau had left. "Beg your pardon, Mister Notary! but do people come to a wine-shop to ask for pens, ink, and paper? No; they come to a wine-shop to ask for wine;" and joining practice to precept, he called out, "Here—some more wine—some more wine!"

In the mean time, Madame Tellier, leaving Babet to attend upon Molicar, had returned to Bernard, and placed before him the three articles he had asked for.

Bernard looked up, and observing that she was dressed in black, said,—

"Why are you in mourning?"

The poor woman turned pale, and in a voice almost suffocated, replied,—

"Good Heavens! don't you remember the misfortune that has befallen me?"

"I remember nothing," said Bernard. "Why are you in mourning?"

"You know very well why, dear Monsieur Bernard, since you came to his funeral. I am in mourning for my poor child, Antoine, who died a month ago."

"Ah! poor woman."

"I had none but that one, Monsieur Bernard; he was my only child, and Heaven took him from me notwithstanding. Oh! I feel the want of him very, very sadly. When a mother has had her child twenty years with her, and then suddenly loses him, what is she to do? Weep. She does weep, but you know that what is lost is lost."

And the poor woman burst into tears.

Molicar chose this moment to shout out a drinking song; *it was* his favourite song, and the hydrometer by which one

could gauge the liquid he had taken. In other words, when he began his song, he was drunk.

He began,—

"Oh! had I but a garden,
And a small plot of vines."

This song sounded like a direct insult to Madame Tellier's grief, with which Bernard sympathized so strongly notwithstanding his assumed indifference, that he bounded from his seat.

"Will you hold your tongue!" he called out.

But Molicar, paying no attention to Bernard's objection, went on :—

"Oh! had I but a garden——"

"Hold your tongue, I say," cried the young man with a menacing gesture.

"And why should I hold my tongue?" said Molicar.

"Don't you hear what this poor woman says! don't you see there is a mother here weeping, and weeping for her child?"

"True enough," said Molicar; "and so I won't sing out loud. And he went on in an under-tone :—

"Oh! had I——"

"Neither soft nor loud!" cried Bernard. "Hold your noise, or be off with you."

"Oh!" said Molicar, "I don't mind, I'll be off. I like a wine-shop where people laugh and not where people cry. Here, Mother Tellier," he said, knocking on the table, "come and take what's owing to you."

"Never mind," said Bernard, "I will settle your account. Leave us alone."

"All right," said Molicar, staggering to his feet; "I ask for nothing better."

And he staggered away, leaning against the trees, and singing as he went along, increasing the sound of his voice the farther he went.

"Oh! had I but a garden,
And a small plot of vines."

Bernard watched him disappear with a feeling of the profoundest disgust, and then returning to Madame Tellier, who was still crying bitterly, he said,—

"Yes, you're right; what is lost is lost, indeed. Would

that I were in your son's place, and that your son were not dead."

"Oh! Heaven preserve you!" cried the good woman; "*you*, Monsieur Bernard!"

"Yes, I! upon my word of honour."

"You, who have such kind good parents," she continued." "Ah! if you did but know the misery a mother suffers in losing her child, you would never utter such a wish as that."

In the mean time, Bernard had been trying to write, but to no purpose; his hand trembled so much that he could not form a letter.

"I cannot—I cannot write!" he cried, as he dashed the pen upon the table.

"I don't wonder at it, for you're trembling as if you had a fever," said the poor woman.

"Will you do me a service, Madame Tellier?" said Bernard.

"Most willingly, Monsieur Bernard," was her reply; "what is it?"

"It's not more than a step from this place to the Maison-Neuve, is it?"

"No, not more than a quarter of an hour's walk, by walking fast."

"In that case, do me the kindness—although I really beg your pardon for the trouble."

"Never mind, what is it?"

"Be good enough to go there, and ask for Catherine."

"Has she returned, then?"

"Yes, this morning; and tell her I will write soon."

"That you will write soon?"

"To-morrow, when my hand will be steadier."

"You are going to leave this place, then?"

"There is a report that we are going to have a war with the Algerians."

"But what does the war matter to you, for you have drawn a good number at the conscription?"

"You will go where I tell you, will you not, Madame Tellier?"

"Yes, at once, dear Monsieur Bernard; but——"

"But what?"

"Your parents?"

"Well, what about my parents?"

"What shall I say to them?"

"*To* them?"

"Yes."

"Nothing."

"What do you mean by nothing?"

"No, nothing, except that I came here, that they will never see me again, and that I bid them farewell."

"Farewell!" repeated Madame Tellier.

"Tell them to keep Catherine with them, and that I shall be grateful for any kindness they may show her; and that if I should chance to die like your poor Antoine, I beg them to leave everything they have to Catherine."

And the young man, whose fever had now subsided and his strength with it, let his head fall upon his hands with a sigh that sounded like a sob.

Madame Tellier looked at him with a feeling of the deepest pity.

"I'll go at once, Monsieur Bernard," she resumed. "It's quite dark now; nobody else will come now, and Babet will be quite enough to attend to them, even if they should; so I'll be off to the Maison-Neuve, and," she then added to herself, as she returned in-doors, "poor fellow, I think he would feel it as a kindness."

Molicar's drunken voice was heard in the distance still singing,—

"Oh! had I but a garden,
And a small plot of vines."

Bernard remained for some minutes plunged in reflection, which, judging from the convulsive movement of his shoulders, was of a very sorrowful cast; at last, raising his face from his hands, shaking his head as if to dispel the gloomy thoughts which beset him, he said, as if speaking to himself,—

"Come, come, courage; one more glass of wine and let me be off."

"Oh! it's no affair of mine," said a voice behind Bernard, which made him start; "but I wouldn't go off in that manner, if I were you."

Bernard turned round, although, strictly speaking, there was no occasion to do so, for he had recognized the voice.

"Is that you, Mathieu?" he said.

"Yes," was the reply.

"What was that you were saying just now?"

"Didn't you hear? You must be very hard of hearing, then?"

"I did hear; but I didn't understand."

"Well! I'll say it over again, then."

"Say on."

"I said that in your place I wouldn't go off like that."

"You wouldn't go?"

"No; not, at least, without——but it don't matter, I understand."

"Without what?—speak."

"Well, then, without having my revenge upon one of them. There, the murder's out now."

"Who? what? whom are you speaking of?"

"Yes, upon one of them, I say; either upon him or her."

"How can I have my revenge, as you call it, upon my father or my mother?" said Bernard, shrugging his shoulders.

"What nonsense to speak of your father or mother! What have they got to do with the matter?"

"With what matter?"

"Why, the matter about the Parisian and Mademoiselle Catherine."

"Catherine and Monsieur Chollet?" cried Bernard, starting to his feet as if he had been bitten by a viper.

"Yes."

"Mathieu! Mathieu!"

"The person who told me, told me also to say nothing about it."

"Why so?"

"Why, because if I told you, I should have to bear the consequences."

"No, no, Mathieu; I swear you shall not suffer; speak."

"But can't you guess what it is?" said Mathieu.

"What *can* I guess? Come, speak, speak."

"Well, I never! it's hardly worth while having good parts and a good education, if it only makes a man deaf as well as blind."

"Mathieu!" cried Bernard, "have you seen or heard anything?"

"The screech-owl sees clear enough at night," said Mathieu; "its eyes are open fast enough, though others may be shut. It watches while others are asleep."

"Come," said Bernard, trying to soften his voice, "what have you seen and heard? Don't keep me waiting in such anxiety any longer, Mathieu."

"Well," replied the other, "as to the obstacle to your *marriage*; for there was one, wasn't there?"

"Yes; what then?"

"Do you know who is the cause of it?"

The perspiration trickled down poor Bernard's face.

"My father," he said.

"Your father! Yes, that's very likely. There's nothing he would wish for better than to see you happy. He loves you very much, poor man!"

"Ah!—and the obstacle, then, proceeds from some one who don't care for me?"

"Why, you must know," resumed Mathieu, without allowing a single emotion among the many which passed hurriedly across Bernard's face, to escape his attention, "that there are a good many people who pretend to be very fond of you, and who say: 'My dear Bernard here, and my dear Bernard there,' and yet who are deceiving you all the time."

"Come, whom does the obstacle come from, my dear Mathieu? tell me."

"Yes, so that you may spring at my throat and strangle me."

"No, no, upon my honour, I swear I will not."

"At all events," said Mathieu, "let me get a little farther from you;" and he drew back a couple of paces, and then, feeling a little safer at his distance from Bernard, said,—

"Well! don't you see that the obstacle is in Mademoiselle Catherine herself."

Bernard turned perfectly livid, but did not stir.

"In Catherine?" he said; "you said that it was some one who didn't love me, and do you mean to say that Catherine does not care for me?"

"I mean," said Mathieu, getting bolder at Bernard's affected calmness of demeanour, "that there are some young girls, especially when they have seen what sort of a place Paris is, who would far sooner be the mistress of a rich young man in Paris, than the wife of a poor young man in a village."

"You don't mean that for Catherine and for the Parisian, I hope."

"Eh! eh!" said Mathieu, "who knows?"

"Wretch!" cried Bernard, springing upon Mathieu with a single bound, and seizing him by the throat with both hands.

"Well, what did I tell you?" cried Mathieu in a half-strangled voice, and making useless efforts to disengage himself from his iron grasp. "You're strangling me, Monsieur Bernard. I won't tell you another word."

Bernard wanted to learn everything. Whoever has once dipped his lips in the bitter cup of jealousy, cannot leave off until he has drained it to the very dregs.

Bernard let go his hold of Mathieu and his arms sank powerlessly by his side.

"Mathieu," he said, "I beg your pardon, but go on, go on; yet, if you *should* be telling a lie!" and he clenched his fists in silent menace.

"Well, and suppose I should," said Mathieu, "it will be quite time enough for you to put yourself out, then; but as you choose to get out of temper first, I shan't say another word."

"I was wrong," said Bernard, forcing his features to assume a calm and unconcerned expression, while all the vipers of jealousy were gnawing at his heart.

"Well, that's all right," said Mathieu; "you're more reasonable now."

"Yes."

"But it don't matter," he continued.

"What don't matter?"

"Yes it's better that you should see with your own eyes, for that's the only way to satisfy a man like you."

"You're right," returned Bernard; "let me see and judge for myself, Mathieu."

"I ask for nothing better; but only on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you will give me your word of honour to see the affair out to the very end."

"Yes, to the very end, upon my honour. But how shall I know when I am at the end? How shall I know that I have seen all?"

"Why, when you've seen Mademoiselle Catherine and Monsieur Chollet together at the Prince's Fountain."

"Catherine and Monseiur Chollet at the Prince's Fountain together!" exclaimed Bernard.

"Yes."

"And when shall I see that, Mathieu?"

"It's eight o'clock now. Eight o'clock and how much more. Look at your watch, Monsieur Bernard."

Bernard drew his watch from his pocket with a hand which had resumed its usual firmness, for as the moment of approaching struggle arrived, the wrestler found his strength return.

"A quarter to nine," he said.

"In a quarter of an hour, then," said Mathieu; "that isn't very long to wait, is it?"

"At nine o'clock you say," said Bernard, passing his hand across his forehead which was covered with cold perspiration.

"Yes, at nine o'clock."

"Catherine and the Parisian at the Prince's Fountain!" murmured Bernard, still incredulous, in spite of Mathieu's assurance; "but what are they going to do there?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Mathieu, while not a single word from Bernard's lips, not a movement of his features, not a throb of his heart even, escaped Mathieu's attention; "to arrange their departure, perhaps."

"Their departure!" said Bernard, pressing his head between his hands as if he were going mad.

"Yes," continued Mathieu. "This evening, at Villers-Cotterets, the Parisian went to get some gold."

"Gold?"

"He asked everybody to lend him some."

"Mathieu," murmured Bernard, "you are making me suffer as I never suffered yet; if it is for the mere pleasure of making me suffer, be warned in time."

"Hush!" said Mathieu.

"A horse's step," murmured Bernard.

Mathieu placed one of his hands upon Bernard's arm, and stretching out the other in the direction whence the sound proceeded, he whispered,—

"Look."

And Bernard saw through the trees, and in the midst of the surrounding obscurity, a horseman approaching whom his hatred easily enabled him to recognize as his rival. Instinctively he threw himself behind the nearest tree.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### OPPORTUNITY MAKES THE THIEF.

THE young rider stopped about fifty paces from Madame Tellier's wine-shop, looked all round him, and seeing nothing to arouse his uneasiness, leaped off his horse and fastened it to a tree. Then, after having once more looked narrowly into the surrounding obscurity, he advanced towards the wine-shop.

"Ah! there he is," muttered Bernard; "here he comes." And he made a movement as if he were about to throw himself across his path; but Mathieu stopped him.

"Take care," he said; "if he sees you, you will see nothing."

"Yes, yes, you're right," replied Bernard; and he glided round the tree, so to reach the side on which the shadow was projected, whilst Mathieu stealthily made his way to the shelter of the little shed made of green boughs, like the serpent who had just performed his allotted part.

The young man, continuing to advance, soon reached the circle of light projected by the candles which had been left upon the tables where the customers had been carousing, those customers having, however, gradually disappeared.

The wine-shop was, or seemed to be, deserted; and Louis Chollet had every reason to think himself quite alone.

"Upon my word," he said, looking at the different objects around him, "I am almost, if not quite, sure that this is Madame Tellier's wine-shop, but the devil take me if I know where the Prince's Fountain is."

Bernard was so close to him that, although he spoke in a very low tone of voice, he had heard every word.

"The Prince's Fountain," he repeated.

And he looked all round, as if in search of Mathieu; but Mathieu had disappeared, at least as far as he could see, Mathieu having secreted himself under the shed.

"Madame Tellier!" cried Louis Chollet, "Madame Tellier!"

The young girl whom we have observed assisting Madame *Tellier in* attendance upon her customers, and whom we have

heard called by the name of Babet, came out of the house at the summons.

"You called Madame Tellier, Monsieur Chollet?" she said.

"Yes, my girl," replied the latter.

"She isn't in now."

"Where has she gone to?"

"She has gone to the Maison-Neuve on the Soissons road, to the Watrins'."

"The devil!" said the young man; "I hope she won't meet Catherine and prevent her coming."

"Meet Catherine and prevent her coming!" repeated Bernard, who did not lost a word of what the Parisian was saying. "This is madness," he continued; "it cannot be true."

Chollet then, calling Babet, said,—

"Come here, my girl."

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"You can, perhaps, help me to find what I am looking for."

"What is that, sir?"

"Is the Prince's Fountain far from here?"

"Oh, dear, no; there it is, sir," replied the young girl; "not more than a hundred paces from here."

"A hundred paces, you say?"

The young girl pointed to the oak which reared its lofty bulk just outside the door, and said,—

"You can see it from the foot of that tree."

"Show it me, my girl."

The young girl climbed up the little knoll upon the summit of which stood a magnificent oak, a contemporary of Francis the First, and which had remained standing whilst twelve generations of wood had passed away.

"Look there, just in the moon's rays yonder you can see that little stream of water which looks like a skein of silver; well, that is the Prince's Fountain."

"Thank you, my girl."

"There's nothing to thank me for."

"Yes, indeed; and the proof is, here is something for the trouble you have taken."

Louis Chollet, whom happiness had rendered generous, drew his purse, which was crammed full of gold, out of his pocket, to take out a piece of money; but the heavy purse slipped out of his hands, and falling on the ground, disgorged a part of the money it contained.

"There," said Chollet, "I have let my purse fall."

"Wait a moment," said Babet, "I will give you a light; it's no use sowing that, Monsieur Chollet, for it won't grow."

"Oh!" murmured Bernard, who had started at the sound which the purse had made in falling on the ground, "it *was* the truth he told me!"

At this moment Babet returned with a candle, and, holding it down, showed a hundred pieces of gold glittering upon the gravel, while through the meshes of the long purse as many again were visible.

Chollet bent down on one knee to pick up the money. Had he been less occupied with this operation, he might have seen Mathieu's head stretching out of his covert, with his glistening eyes fixed covetously on the gold.

"There's plenty of money there," he muttered; "when one thinks that there are some people who have so much gold, while there are others who——"

At a sudden movement which Chollet made, Mathieu's head was drawn back under the shed, just as a tortoise draws its head within its shell.

Chollet had finished his golden harvest; he picked up the last twenty-franc piece, and, instead of putting it with the others, gave it to Babet.

"Thank you, little one," he said, "that is for yourself."

"A twenty-franc piece?" exclaimed the young girl, delightedly; "but you can't mean all that for me?"

"Yes, let it be the beginning of your marriage portion."

Suddenly the village clock was heard to strike.

"What time is that?" asked the Parisian.

"Nine o'clock," replied Babet.

"All right, then; I thought I should have been late."

And, placing his hand upon his breast to satisfy himself that his purse was in the side-pocket of his coat, for his waistcoat pocket would have been small to have held it, he ascended the little eminence, leaned for a moment against the oak to look in front of him, and descending in the direction of the little valley where the fountain was flowing, he disappeared.

"Ah!" murmured the young girl, looking at her piece of gold by the light of her candle, "here's good luck! Those are the sort of people who deserve to be rich."

She then returned into the house, and as there was no probability of seeing any other customers arrive, she

fastened the two shutters one after the other, and, after closing the door, was heard to lock and bolt it carefully.

Bernard remained alone in the darkness, or rather he fancied he was alone, for he had ceased to bestow a thought upon Mathieu. He stood with his shoulder leaning against the beech, his brows knit in sorrow no less than in anger, one hand pressed against his heart, the other clutched round the barrel of his gun.

Mathieu was watching him through an opening he had made in the branches of which his hiding-place was formed.

Bernard looked as if he had been changed into a statue, for he remained for several minutes as motionless and silent as one. At last, however, he seemed to rouse himself, and looking all round him, murmured in a low voice,—

"Mathieu! Mathieu!"

Mathieu took very good care not to answer; but as the alteration of Bernard's voice indicated the distress of mind to which he was a prey, he redoubled his attention.

"He has gone away," continued Bernard; "he was afraid of what might take place; and if Catherine comes to this rendezvous, he is right."

And Bernard, quitting the shadow of the beech, made several rapid strides in the direction his rival had taken. Suddenly stopping, he said,—

"But is it so certain, after all, that this young man is in love with Catherine and not with some one else? Who knows whether Mathieu is not mistaken, and whether the person with whom he has a rendezvous is not some young girl belonging to Villers-Hellon, Corcy, or Longpont? Besides, we shall see who it really turns out to be; for that is my reason for coming here."

And then, as if his limbs were failing him, he said,—

"Come, Bernard, courage. Far better to know the real truth than to go on doubting and suspecting in this way. Oh! Catherine," he continued, as he approached the oak, "if you are so false as that, if you have deceived me in this manner, I will never believe in anything again; no! in nothing, nothing in the world. I, who loved her so fondly, so deeply, so sincerely; I, who would have laid down my life for her if she had asked it."

And looking around him with an indescribable expression of menace, he added,—

"Fortunately, every one has left, the lights are out, and

if any misfortune should take place, it will be between the night, them, and myself."

And then, with a stealthy tread, with the footfall of a wolf approaching a sheepfold, he quietly gained the foot of the oak, and, crawling along the roots, reached the trunk.

He breathed more freely when he had attained it, for the Parisian was still alone. Bernard, with his gun ready cocked like a sportsman following his game, and his eyes fixed steadily in front of him, did not lose one of his rival's movements.

"Good!" he said, speaking to himself and sweeping the horizon with his glance, "the girl he is waiting for, is, it would seem, to come from the Soissons road. Suppose I were to go and meet her? If I made her ashamed of herself? No! I should learn nothing in that case; she would be sure to tell an untruth."

Then, suddenly turning his head to the opposite side,—

"A noise in that direction," he said; "no, it is his horse getting impatient and pawing the ground with his feet. Besides," he added with indifference, "what do I care for any sound which may come from that direction? no, it is there that my eyes ought to look, and there that my ears ought to listen. Good Heavens! is that a figure I see approaching through the trees; no, no!"

Bernard passed his hand across his eyes, for his sight had grown dim and flushed.

"Yes, it is," he continued, with so deep a voice that it seemed as if it proceeded from the depths of his breast; "it is a woman; she hesitates! no, she walks on! She is about to cross that glade yonder, and then I shall see her clearly."

There was a moment's silence, and then a deep groan burst from his lips.

"It is Catherine," said Bernard, gnashing his teeth; "he sees her; he is moving towards her; but he shall never reach her!"

At these words Bernard rose upon one knee and murmured,—

"Catherine! Catherine! may the blood I am about to shed fall upon your head."

He raised the gun slowly to his shoulder. Thrice was the young keeper's cheek bent down upon the butt of his gun, thrice did his finger press the trigger; but every time were his cheek and his finger withdrawn.

*At last,* with the cold sweat of agonized feelings upon his

brow, with a veil of blood before his eyes, and his breast heaving tumultuously, he murmured,—

"No, no! I am not an assassin. I am Bernard Watrin, an honest man. Oh! God help me, help me!"

And throwing his gun away, he fled almost bewildered through the wood, without knowing whither he was hurrying.

Again was there a moment's silence, and the fiend that inspired the whole design could see Mathieu's head gradually steal out of his covert, and then observe him crawl, with suspended breath, until he reached the foot of the oak, look in his turn towards the Prince's Fountain, stretch out his hand towards the gun which Bernard had thrown down, seize it with his clenched hand, as he murmured,—

"Well! so much the worse! why had he such a lot of money about him? The opportunity makes the thief."

And then he took a steady aim at the young Parisian.

Suddenly a bright flash illumined the dark gloom, a loud report rung out in the stillness of the night, and Louis Chollet, with a loud cry bursting from his lips, fell to the ground.

It was answered by another cry, that of Catherine, who had stopped abruptly when she found the Parisian where she had expected to find her lover, and who fled horror-stricken when she saw Bernard's rival fall.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE INTERIOR OF GUILLAUME WATRIN'S HOUSE.

While this nocturnal drama, visible to the eye of Heaven alone, was taking place at the Prince's Fountain, the dinner, which was intended to exhibit to the mayor the culinary talents which Madame Watrin possessed, was drawing to its close, the satisfaction derived from it being greatly marred by Bernard's absence.

Half-past eight had just struck by the cuckoo clock. The Abbé Grégoire, who had already, two or three times, seemed desirous of withdrawing, now rose, as if he were determined to depart.

But it was not Watrin's custom to allow his guests to leave in such a manner.

"No, no, Monsieur l'Abbé," he said, "not until you have drunk one more toast."

"But," said his wife, uneasily, and with tears ready to flow at a moment's warning, for she had not once forgotten that Bernard's place was still untenanted, "Catherine and François ought to be here."

She was afraid to speak of Bernard, although her thoughts had dwelt almost alone upon him.

"Well, where are they?" asked Watrin; "they were here just now."

"Yes, but they went out separately, a little while ago; and people say it is unlucky to drink healths at the end of a feast, in the absence of those who were present at the beginning."

"Well, Catherine can't be far; call her, wife."

Marianne shook her head.

"I have already called her, and she didn't answer."

"She has been gone about ten minutes," said the abbé.

"Have you been to her room?" asked Watrin.

"Yes; she isn't there."

"And François?"

"Oh! as for François, we know where to find him; he has gone to help to get the calèche ready."

"*Mon*sieur Guillaume," said the abbé, "we will pray

Heaven to forgive us for drinking a health in the absence of two guests; but it is late, and I ought to be leaving."

"Wife," said Watrin, "fill Monsieur le Maire's glass, and let everybody listen to our dear abbé."

The abbé raised his glass, about a third full of wine, and with that low gentle voice, in which he addressed his Maker and the poor, said,—

"Here is to domestic peace,—to the union of the father and the mother—of the husband and the wife—the sole union which can secure the happiness of the children."

"Bravo! abbé," cried the mayor.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Guillaume; "and may the heart you mean to touch not be deaf to your voice."

And the glance he threw at Marianne indicated that this wish was intended especially for her benefit.

"And now, my dear Guillaume," said the abbé, "you won't think me rude if I go and look for my cloak and my hat and stick, and if I beg Monsieur le Maire to take me back to town as soon as he can, for nine o'clock will very shortly strike."

"Oh, go and look for your things, certainly, abbé," said the mayor; "and while you are looking for them, I will just say a few words to Watrin."

"Come, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Marianne, whom the worthy priest's toast had rendered very thoughtful, "I think your things are in the next room."

"I will follow you, then, Madame Watrin," said the abbé.

And as they both left the room the clock struck nine.

Guillaume and the mayor were left alone.

A moment's silence ensued; each seemed to wait for the other to speak the first.

It was Guillaume who risked it.

"Well, Monsieur le Maire," he said, "what is your receipt for becoming a millionaire?"

"In the first place," said the mayor, "let us shake hands, to show that we are good friends, dear Monsieur Guillaume."

"Oh! as far as that goes, with pleasure."

And the two men, seated on either side of the table, stretched out their hands, which met just above the remains of that famous pie which had occupied so much of Madame Watrin's time and attention.

"And now," said Guillaume, "for the proposition."

The mayor coughed.

"You receive seven hundred and fifty-six francs a year, don't you?"

"And a hundred and fifty francs as a gratuity; altogether, nine hundred francs."

"So that it will take you ten years to make nine thousand francs."

"You are as good a reckoner as the late Barême, Monsieur Raisin."

"Well, Guillaume," continued the mayor, "what you gain in ten years I offer to get for you in three hundred and sixty-five days."

"Oh! oh! let us see how that is to be managed?" said Guillaume, placing both his elbows on the table, and leaning his head on both his hands.

"Well," continued the mayor, with a sly laugh, "all you've got to do is to close your right or your left eye whenever you happen to pass certain trees, which lie either on the right or the left of my late purchase. It's very easy, you see; you've nothing more to do than that."

And the honest timber-merchant, with a wonderful facility, closed first one and then the other eye.

"Ah!" said Guillaume, looking him steadily in the face, "so that's your means, is it?"

"Well," replied the timber-merchant, "it seems to me to be as good as any other."

"And you will give me nine thousand francs for that?"

"Four thousand five hundred francs for the right eye, and four thousand five hundred francs for the left."

"And in the meanwhile, you——"

And Guillaume made a gesture like a man cutting down a tree.

"And in the mean while, I——" replied the timber-merchant, making the same gesture.

"In the mean while, you would be robbing the duke of Orleans."

"Oh, robbing!" said Raisin, chuckling in spite of the word; "there are so many trees in the forest, that nobody can count them."

"True," said Guillaume, with a solemnity of manner almost menacing, "except One, who knows not only the number of the trees, but also of the leaves; except One, who sees and hears everything, and who knows already, although we are alone here, that you have just made me an infamous proposal."

"Monsieur Guillaume!" exclaimed the mayor, fancying that by raising his voice he should awe the old keeper.

But Guillaume rose, and leaning his hand upon the table, while with the other he pointed to the window,—

"Do you see that window?" he said.

"Well, what then?"

"If," said Guillaume, "this house was not mine—if we had not just ate at the same table, you would have gone out of that window."

"Monsieur Guillaume!"

"Wait a moment," said the old keeper, perfectly unmoved.

"Well?"

"You see that door?"

"Yes."

"The sooner, then, that you are on the other side, the better for you."

"Monsieur Guillaume!"

"Only, when you once cross it, you never cross it again."

"Monsieur!"

"Silence! some one is coming—there is no use any one knowing that I have received such a scoundrel at my table." And Guillaume, turning his back to the mayor, began to whistle a little hunting air, with which our readers have already made acquaintance, and which he reserved for grand occasions.

The persons before whom Guillaume declined to tell the mayor that he was a scoundrel were the Abbé Grégoire and Madame Watrin.

"Here I am, Monsieur le Maire," said the abbé, looking for the timber-merchant as well as his short sight would allow him—"are you ready?"

"Yes; the mayor is so far ready," said Guillaume, "that he is waiting for you outside the door."

And he pointed to the timber-merchant, who, following his advice, had crossed the threshold.

The abbé neither saw nor understood what had passed, and left the house without observing the warmth of the conversation.

"Good-night, Monsieur Guillaume," he said; "may, with the blessing I give you, the peace of Heaven descend upon your house."

"Your servant, Monsieur l'Abbé; your servant, Monsieur le Maire," said Madame Watrin, following her two guests, and making a courtesy at every step.

Guillaume looked after them as long as he could see them, and then, turning his back to the door with a movement of the shoulders peculiar to himself, took out his pipe, which he filled as full as it would hold, put it in its usual place between his jaws, and, striking a light with the flint and steel, muttered to himself, with his teeth so closely shut, that the words could scarcely pass through,—

"Well, I've just made another enemy, but that don't matter: a man is either an honest man, or he isn't; if he is, let come what may, he can't do otherwise than what I have done. Oh! here's the old woman coming back; mum 's the word, Guillaume!" and pressing the flint upon the lighted tinder in the bowl of his pipe, he began to blow out thick clouds of smoke, symbolical of the silent wrath which made his heart and his brow so heavy and overcast.

Madame Watrin had merely to cast a glance at her husband, to perceive that something extraordinary had happened.

She went away, then came back, turned first one way, then another, passed before him, behind him, but could not get anything more out of him than a volume of smoke, which grew denser every moment.

At last she determined to break the silence.

"I say, Guillaume!" she hazarded.

"What?" replied Watrin, with a paucity of words which would have done honour to a Pythagorean.

Marianne hesitated a moment.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Why don't you speak?"

"Because I've nothing to say."

Marianne moved away, and then returned to the old keeper several times.

If her husband had nothing to say, she evidently was not in the same disposition of mind.

"Hum!" she said.

Watrin didn't take any notice of the "hum!"

"Guillaume."

"What do you want now?" was her husband's reply.

"When is the marriage to take place?" asked Madame Watrin.

"What marriage?"

"Why, Catherine's and Bernard's marriage, of course."

Watrin felt as if he had been suddenly relieved of an immense burden, but still did not allow anything to be observed.

"Ah! ah!" he said, placing his hand upon his hips, and looking at her full in the face, "so you've become reasonable at last, have you?"

"I say," continued Marianne, without answering his question, "I think that the sooner it takes place, the better."

"So do I."

"Suppose we fix it for next week?"

"And the banns?"

"We will go to Soissons to ask for a dispensation."

"Ah! you're in a greater hurry than I am, now."

"Why, husband," said Marianne, "the fact is, that—that——"

"That—that—what?"

"That I never spent such a day as this since we have been married."

"Bah!"

"For you and me to separate, to die away from each other!" And her bosom began to heave. "And that too, after having been married for six-and-twenty years!" she continued, and then burst into tears.

"Give me your hand, wife," said Guillaume.

"Oh! there it is," exclaimed Marianne, "with all my heart."

Guillaume drew his good-hearted wife towards him.

"And now," he said, "give me a kiss;" and then looking at her, he added: "you're the best wife in the world." But by way of supplementary remark, he said, "When you like, I mean."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marianne, "I promise you, Guillaume, that from this day I shall always like to be so."

"*Amen!*" said Guillaume.

At this moment François entered the room. Had any one looked at the good-hearted fellow more attentively than Watrin did, he would have seen that something had greatly disturbed him.

"There!" he said, with an evident meaning in his voice, in order that Guillaume might observe his presence in the room, and which did in fact make Guillaume turn round.

"Well!" he asked, "are they packed off?"

"Don't you hear them?" he replied, as the sound of a carriage was heard along the road. "They are off now."

And then, while Guillaume was listening to the receding sound of the carriage which gradually grew fainter in the

distance, François went to the corner of the fireplace and took up his gun.

Guillaume observed this movement.

"Well!" he said, "where are you going?"

"I am going—well, I must tell you that when you're alone."

Guillaume turned round towards his wife and said to her,—

"The best thing you can do is to clear the things away; it will be so much trouble saved you to-morrow."

"Well! what else am I doing?" she asked, holding an empty bottle under one arm and half a dozen plates in each hand, and moving off in the direction of the kitchen, the door of which she shut after her.

Guillame watched her leave, and when she had disappeared, said,—

"What's the matter?"

François approached him, and said in a low voice,—

"While I was putting the mayor's horses to, I heard a gun fired."

"In what direction?"

"Somewhere in the direction of Corcy, close by the Prince's Fountain."

"And you think it's a poacher, eh?" asked Guillaume.

François shook his head.

"No?"

"No," repeated François.

"Well! what is it, then?"

"Monsieur Watrin," continued François, lowering his voice a little, "I recognized the sound of Bernard's gun."

"Are you sure?" asked Watrin, with a certain uneasiness, for he could not understand what motive Bernard could have in firing a shot at that hour.

"I could recognize it among fifty," returned François; "you know that he uses either felt or cardboard wads, which sound very differently to paper wads."

"Bernard's gun," said Guillaume to himself, getting more and more uneasy, "what does that mean?"

"Yes, indeed, what does it mean? That is the very thing I have been asking myself."

"Listen," said Guillaume, starting, "I hear a noise."

François listened.

"It's a woman's step," he murmurred.

"*Catherine's*, perhaps."

François made a sign in the negative.

"It's the step of an older woman than Mademoiselle Catherine," he said; "Mademoiselle Catherine has a far lighter step than that. The woman who owns that footstep will never see forty again."

At the same moment the sound of a couple of knocks was heard at the door.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE LOOK OF AN HONEST MAN.

The two men looked at each other; there was something in the air which seemed like the presentiment of misfortune.

During these few moments' silence and uneasiness, some one was heard to pronounce Monsieur Watrin's name twice. Guillaume's wife entered the room at this moment.

"What is that, and who is it calling you, Watrin?"

"It's Madame Tellier's voice," said Guillaume; "open the door, wife."

Marianne hastened to the door, opened it, and Madame Tellier appeared on the threshold, almost out of breath, at the rapidity with which she had arrived.

"Good evening, Monsieur Watrin and the company," she said; "give me a chair, if you please, I have run all the way from the Prince's Fountain."

The two men, at the mention of the Prince's Fountain, again looked at each other.

And then Guillaume, in a voice which trembled slightly, said,—

"And what has procured us the pleasure of seeing you at such an hour as this?"

The only reply he obtained from Madame Tellier was, as she raised her hand to her throat,—

"A drop of water, for Heaven's sake, I'm choking."

Madame Watrin hastened to get the poor woman what she needed, and which she drank with avidity.

"And now I can speak," she said, "I will tell you what brought me here."

"Do, do," said Guillaume and Marianne together, while François, who was standing a little aside, shook his head sorrowfully.

"Well, then," continued Madame Tellier, "I come from your son."

"From Bernard?"

"From my son?" said Guillaume and Marianne together.

"What can have happened to him, poor young fellow?" asked the messenger of evil tidings; "he came to my place an hour ago, as pale as death."

"Wife!" said Guillaume looking at Marianne.

"Don't speak, don't speak," was her answer, understanding the extent of the reproach conveyed in this single word.

"He drank two or three glasses of wine, one after the other. When I say one after the other, I'm wrong; he drank them right off all at once, for he drank out of the bottle."

This single circumstance was sufficient of itself to terrify Guillaume; to drink out of the bottle was so contrary to Bernard's habits, that this fact alone indicated a considerable derangement in the equilibrium of his mind.

"Bernard drink out of the bottle?" repeated Guillaume; "impossible!"

"And did he drink without saying a word?" asked Marianne.

"No," returned the good woman; "on the contrary, he said to me, 'Madame Tellier, do me the kindness to go to the house, and tell Catherine that I will write to her soon.'"

"What! did he say that?" exclaimed Madame Watrin.

"Write to Catherine! and why write to Catherine?" asked Guillaume, his uneasiness increasing.

"Oh! that gun-shot," murmured François.

"And did he say that, and nothing more?" asked Marianne.

"Oh! yes, wait and I'll tell you."

Never did a narrator have a more attentive auditory.

Madame Tellier continued,—

"I then asked him, 'Is there nothing for your father? nothing for your mother?'"

"*Ah! you* did quite right," said the husband and wife,

breathing like persons who are at last about to learn something.

"To that he answered, 'Tell my father and mother that I passed by here, and then bid them farewell from me.'"

"Farewell?" repeated the three voices at the same time, with three different intonations.

Then Guillaume alone,—

"He told you to say farewell to us?"

And turning towards his wife, he said in a tone of the deepest reproach, as he covered his eyes with his hand,—

"Oh! wife, wife!"

"But that isn't all," continued the messenger.

A similar movement brought Guillaume, Marianne, and François close to her.

"What else did he say?" asked Guillaume.

"He added, 'Tell them also to keep Catherine with them, that I shall always be grateful for any kindness they may show her, and if I should die like your poor Antoine'——"

"Die!" interrupted the poor old couple, now as pale as death.

"'Tell them,'" continued Madame Tellier, "'to leave everything they have to Catherine.'"

"Wife! wife! wife!" cried Guillaume, wringing his hands.

"Oh! that wretched gun-shot!" murmured Marianne as she sank into a chair and burst into a flood of tears, for the poor woman felt that she was the chief cause of it all, and the greater the uneasiness her husband displayed, the greater was her own remorse.

At this moment a loud wailing cry was heard outside the door.

"Help! help!" cried an almost inaudible voice.

Faint as this voice was, there was not a person present who did not recognize it; and Guillaume, Marianne, François, and Madame Tellier exclaimed together,—

"Catherine!"

But, of them all, Guillaume was the first to reach the door.

As the door flew open, Catherine appeared, pale, haggard, her hair dishevelled, and seemingly almost bereft of her senses.

"Assassinated!" she cried, "assassinated!"

"Assassinated!" exclaimed the spectators of these two scenes, while their terror increased tenfold.

"Assassinated! assassinated!" repeated Catherine breathlessly, in her uncle's arms.

"Assassinated! but who?"

"Monsieur Louis Chollet."

"The Parisian!" exclaimed François, nearly as pale as Catherine herself.

"What are you saying? what do you mean? Speak, girl, speak!" repeated Guillaume.

"Assassinated! where, dear Mademoiselle Catherine?" asked François.

"At the Prince's Fountain," she murmured in reply.

Guillaume, who was supporting her, almost let her fall.

"But by whom?" asked Madame Tellier and Madame Watrin at the same moment; for they, not having the same reasons for apprehending a dreadful misfortune, had preserved the faculty of interrogating.

"By whom?"

"I don't know," replied Catherine.

The two men breathed again.

"But at all events you can tell us," said Guillaume, "how it took place! How were you there?"

"I thought I was going to meet Bernard at the Prince's Fountain."

"To meet Bernard?"

"Yes, Mathieu had made an appointment for me in Bernard's name."

"Oh! if Mathieu had anything to do with it, we are not at the end yet."

"Well," said Guillaume, "and did you go to the Prince's Fountain?"

"I thought Bernard expected me there; I thought he wished to say good-bye to me. It was not true, though, for it was not he."

"Not he!" cried Guillaume, clinging eagerly to every glimpse of hope.

"It was another man."

"The Parisian?" exclaimed François.

"Yes; when he perceived me, he advanced towards me, for by the brilliant light of the moon he could see distinctly at a distance of fifty paces, through the open glade. When we were about a dozen paces from each other, I recognized him, and immediately perceived that I had fallen into a snare. I *was* about to call out, to scream for help, when suddenly a *bright light* flashed out in the direction of the large oak

which overspreads Madame Tellier's house. The report of a gun followed ; Monsieur Chollet uttered a cry, put his hand to his breast, and fell. Immediately upon that, as you may suppose, I fled like a mad woman ; I ran on without stopping, and here I am ; but had the house been only twenty paces further, I should have fainted, I should have died upon my way."

"A gun-shot!" repeated Guillaume.

"The very one I heard," murmured François.

Suddenly a terrible idea, which she seemed to have previously dismissed from her mind, evidently recurred to her in full force ; she looked all round her, and, observing that he whom her gaze sought was not there, exclaimed,—

"Where is Bernard? where is Bernard? in Heaven's name, where is he! Who has seen him?"

The silence of the very grave would have been the sole reply to this mournful question, had not a squeaking voice proceeded from the door, which had been left half open since Catherine had entered, and said,—

"Where is poor Monsieur Bernard, do you say? I can tell you. He has been arrested."

"Arrested!" Guillaume stammered out.

"My child, Bernard, arrested!" said his wife.

"Oh! Bernard! Bernard! that is what I dreaded," murmurred Catherine, her head falling upon her shoulder, as if she had fainted.

"Oh! Heavens! what a frightful misfortune," said Madame Tellier, clasping her hands.

François, however, with his eyes fixed upon Mathieu, as if bent upon reading, not only everything he would say, but also everything he would not say, ground his teeth together and muttered,—

"Mathieu! Mathieu!"

"Arrested!" repeated Guillaume ; "how? what for?"

"Well, I really can't tell you exactly," replied Mathieu, crossing slowly and leisurely the whole length of the room, in order to take his seat in his usual place by the chimney corner. "It seems some one has shot the Parisian. The gendarmes of Villers-Cotterets, who were returning from the *fête* of Corcy, saw Bernard running away as fast as he could, so they ran after him, seized him by the collar, put the handcuffs on, and are taking him off."

"Where are they taking him to?" asked Guillaume.

"Oh, I don't know ; where they take people to who

assasinate others, I suppose; only I couldn't help saying to myself, 'I like Monsieur Bernard, I like Monsieur Guillaume, I like all the Watrin family, who have been kind to me, who have fed me, and warmed me; I must go and tell them what has happened to poor Monsieur Bernard, because if there should be a means of saving him——'"

"Oh! Heaven!" exclaimed the mother; "when I think that it was I—my obstinacy—my wretched obstinacy, that has been the cause of all this."

Guillaume, however, appeared calmer and stronger, although, perhaps, in spite of appearances, he suffered more than his wife.

"And you say, François," he said in a low voice, "that you recognized the ring of his gun?"

"Didn't I tell you so. I am sure of it."

"Bernard an assassin!" murmured Guillaume; "impossible!"

"Stay a minute," said François, as if struck by a sudden bright thought.

"What!" said the old keeper.

"I only ask three-quarters of an hour."

"What to do?"

"To tell you whether Bernard is or is not the assassin of Monsieur Louis Chollet."

And without taking his cap or his gun, François darted out of the house and disappeared in the copse, running as fast as he could.

Guillaume was so absorbed in thinking over what François had just told him, and was beating his brains so assiduously to discover what he had meant, that he scarcely observed two circumstances, the one being that his wife had fainted, and the other that the Abbé Grégoire had just entered.

Catherine was the first to perceive the excellent priest, whose dark clothes prevented him from being easily distinguished in the obscurity.

"Oh!" she cried, "it is you, Monsieur l'Abbé, it is you."

"Yes," he said. "I suspected there would be tears to wipe away here, and so I returned."

"It is my own fault," cried Madame Watrin, falling upon her knees; "it's my own fault—my own great fault."

And the poor repentant sinner struck her bosom with all the strength of her clenched fists.

"*Alas! my* dear Guillaume, he said to you when he left

this place, may the misery of all that happens fall upon you! and it is indeed upon you that misery has fallen."

"Oh! Monsieur l'Abbé," cried the old keeper, "are you going to join with others in saying he is guilty?"

"We shall soon know the truth," said the abbé.

"Yes, we shall soon know the truth," replied Guillaume. "Bernard is hasty, passionate, violent; but he never told a falsehood yet."

Watrin took up his hat.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to the prison."

"That is useless; we overtook him upon the high-road, between two gendarmes, and the mayor gave orders to bring him here, to proceed in your presence to the first interrogatory; he trusts that you will have sufficient influence over Bernard, who loves you so much, to make him confess the truth."

At this moment, as if he had merely waited to be announced by the abbé, the mayor entered.

Guillaume, as soon as he perceived him, started instinctively. He felt assured that he stood face to face with an enemy.

"Well, Monsieur Watrin," said the mayor, with an evil smile, "you forbade me to cross your threshold—but, you understand, there are certain circumstances——"

Guillaume, who had remarked his smile, observed,—

"And you are not sorry for the circumstances, are you, Monsieur le Maire?"

At this moment the sound of horses' hoofs was heard at the door—this sound drew the mayor from his embarrassment, and dispensed with a reply.

He turned his back to Guillaume, and addressing the gendarmes, who were not yet visible, said,—

"Let the accused come in, and guard the door."

Hardly had this order been given, when Bernard, pale, his brow covered with perspiration, but outwardly calm, crossed the threshold, his two hands fastened together.

When Madame Watrin saw him enter, she returned to her senses, and with a burst of maternal affection,—

"My child—my dear child!" she exclaimed, about to dart into his arms, while Catherine covered her face with her hands.

But Guillaume stopped her, as he caught her by the wrist.

"One moment," he said; "we must first of all know

whether we are speaking to our child, or to an assassin." And addressing the mayor, while the gendarmes led Bernard to the further end of the apartment, he said, "Monsieur le Maire, I ask to be allowed to look Bernard in the face, to say a few words to him, and then I myself will declare to you whether he is guilty or not."

The permission was too difficult to refuse altogether, and the mayor allowed a grunt to escape him, which might be regarded as a consent to the permission sought.

A semicircle was immediately formed, of which Bernard and the two gendarmes were the central point, and Guillaume, stretching out his hand towards his son, and addressing him in a tone which was not deficient in solemnity, began,—

"I call upon all who are here to be witnesses of what I am going to ask him, and of what he may reply. In the presence of this woman who is his mother, in the presence of his affianced bride, in the presence of this holy man of God, who made a Christian of you, Bernard, I, your father—I, who brought you up in the love of truth and in the hatred of falsehood, ask you, Bernard, as God himself will one day ask you, 'Are you guilty, or are you innocent?'" and he fixed upon the young man a look which seemed as if it would read into the depths of his heart.

"Father——" replied the young man in a gentle, calm voice.

But Guillaume interrupted him.

"Take time, Bernard; don't be in a hurry to answer, so that your heart may not plunge you into an abyss from which there is no way of extrication; fix your eyes upon mine, Bernard, and do all of you here look at and listen to him. Answer, Bernard."

"I am innocent, father," said Bernard, in as calm a voice as if it had been a matter of the greatest indifference.

A cry of deep, heartfelt joy burst from the lips of every one present, except Mathieu, the mayor, and the gendarmes.

Guillaume stretched out his hand, and laying it on Bernard's shoulder, said,—

"On your knees, my son."

Bernard obeyed.

And then, with an expression of deep-rooted belief difficult to describe, he murmured,—

"I bless you, my son; you are innocent—that is all I *wanted.* The proof of your innocence will come when

Heaven pleases. It is now a matter between men and you. Embrace me, and let justice take its course."

Bernard rose to his feet, and threw himself into his father's arms.

"And now," said the latter, drawing aside so as to leave Bernard free, "it is your turn, wife."

"Oh! my child—my dear child," exclaimed Madame Watrin, "am I again permitted to embrace you!" and she threw her arms round his neck.

"My good—my excellent mother!" cried Bernard.

Catherine was waiting for her turn; but when she moved as if to advance towards the prisoner, the latter made a gesture with his hands.

"Presently," he said—"presently. I, too, Catherine, have a question to ask you, and which I require you to answer as you value your eternal welfare."

Catherine drew back with a sweet smile, for she, also, was now as sure of Bernard's innocence as of her own.

That which Catherine thought without expressing her thought, Madame Watrin said aloud.

"And I, too," she cried, after having embraced him,—"I will answer for it that he is innocent."

"Well!" said the mayor, chuckling, "you're not so silly as to suppose that if he were guilty he would come forward and say plainly, 'Yes, it was I who killed Monsieur Louis Chollet.' Not such a flat, I should say."

Bernard fixed his clear unflinching gaze upon the mayor, and, with great simplicity of manner, said,—

"I will say this, not for you Monsieur le Maire, but for those who love me,—I will say this, and God who hears me knows whether I speak the truth or not: Yes, my first impulse was to kill Monsieur Chollet when I saw Catherine make her appearance, and when I saw him rise up to go and meet her; yes, I darted forward with that intention, and with that intention I raised the stock of the gun to my shoulder; but at that moment Heaven came to my help, and gave me strength to resist the temptation; I threw my gun away from me, and fled. It was while I was hurrying away that I was arrested; only I did not flee because I had committed a crime, but in order to avoid committing one."

The mayor made a sign; one of the gendarmes handed him a gun.

"Do you recognize this gun?" he asked Bernard.

"Yes, it is mine," replied the young man.

"The right barrel is discharged, you see."

"Perfectly true."

"And it was found at the foot of the oak which overlooks the little valley of the Prince's Fountain."

"That was where I threw it down," said Bernard.

At this moment Mathieu rose with some little hesitation in his manner, put his hand to his cap, and in a timid hesitating voice, which seemed as much to be attributed to modesty as to any other feeling, he said,—

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Maire, I hope you'll excuse me; but I have something to say which may perhaps go to prove poor Monsieur Bernard's innocence. If, for instance, a strict search were to be made, some of the wads might be found; Monsieur Bernard don't load his gun as the other keepers do, with paper, but with round pieces of felt or cardboard, cut out with a punch."

This unexpected suggestion was received with a flattering murmur of applause, for during the last quarter of an hour Mathieu had been completely forgotten.

"Gendarmes," said the mayor, "let one of you proceed to the place of the assassination, and try and find the wads."

"Some one shall go there to-morrow morning at daybreak," replied one of the gendarmes.

The frank, open look which Bernard cast at Mathieu was met by a dull, louring glance from the latter; it seemed as if Bernard saw the eye of a serpent glistening in the gloom. He turned aside with disgust.

Perhaps Mathieu would have remained silent, under the clear, steady gaze which Bernard had fixed upon him; but Bernard had turned away, as we have stated, and the scoundrel took courage and continued,—

"Besides, there is another thing which will go to prove Monsieur Bernard's innocence."

"What is that?" said the mayor.

"I was here this morning," said Mathieu, "when Monsieur Bernard was loading his gun before he went after the wild boar; well, in order to be able to see where the balls from his gun went, he marked them with a cross."

"Ah, ah!" said the mayor; "he marked them with the cross, did he?"

"Yes, I'm sure of that, for I lent him my knife to make the cross with; didn't I, Monsieur Bernard?"

*Under the* seemingly benevolent intention Bernard felt

so instinctively the sharp and bitter tooth of the viper that he did not even reply.

The mayor waited a moment, and seeing that Bernard kept silent,—

"Accused," he said, "are these two circumstances correct?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Bernard, "they are perfectly true."

"You can't help seeing, Monsieur le Maire," continued Mathieu, "that, if the ball were to be found and had no cross upon it, it couldn't have been Monsieur Bernard who fired it; while, on the other hand, supposing the ball did have a cross and that the wads were made of felt, one would hardly know what to say."

A gendarme approached the mayor and, saluting him, said,—

"With your leave, Monsieur le Maire."

"What is the matter, gendarme?"

"Why, Monsieur le Maire, this young fellow here has told the truth," pointing to Mathieu.

"How do you know that, gendarme?" asked the mayor.

"In this way: while he was talking, I drew the charge from the left barrel of the gun. The ball has a cross and the wads are of felt; here they are."

The mayor turned round to Mathieu,—

"My friend," he said, "all that you have just said with a good intention towards Bernard, unfortunately turns against him; since here is his gun, and his gun has been discharged."

"Ah! still that only shows that the gun has been fired off," returned Mathieu, "and that don't go for much, Monsieur le Maire; Monsieur Bernard might have fired off his gun somewhere else: such a proof as that is not worth anything unless the ball and the wads can be found, in which case it would be very unlucky, very unlucky indeed."

The mayor turned towards the accused.

"And so you have nothing else to say in your defence?"

"Nothing," replied Bernard; "except that, although appearances are against me, I am innocent."

"I had hoped," said the mayor, solemnly, "that the sight of your parents, of your intended bride, and" pointing to the Abbé Grégoire, "of this excellent priest, would have induced you to speak the truth, and that was my reason for bringing you here. I was wrong, I have been deceived."

"I can say nothing but what is the strict truth, Monsieur

le Maire. I am guilty of a wicked thought, but I am not guilty of a bad action."

"Are you quite determined?"

"To do what?" asked Bernard.

"Not to confess the truth."

"I would not tell a falsehood *for* myself, monsieur; I could not tell one against myself."

"Move on, gendarmes," said the mayor.

The gendarmes drew up on either side of Bernard, and, placing their hands on his shoulder, said,—

Move on."

At these words, Madame Watrin, recovering from her stupor, darted between the door and her son.

"What are you doing, Monsieur le Maire? Are you going to take him away?" she cried.

"Of course, I am going to take him away," said the mayor.

"But where to?"

"To prison, of course."

"To prison; but didn't you hear him say that he was innocent?"

"The fact is," murmured Mathieu, "that so long as the ball marked with a cross and the felt wads are not found——"

"My dear Madame Watrin, my pretty young lady," said the mayor, "I have a very harsh duty to perform. I am a magistrate. A crime has been committed. I do not examine in what respect I am personally affected by this crime, which suddenly cuts off in his prime a young man placed in my house by his parents, a young man who was very dear to me, and over whom I was charged to watch. No; Chollet, as well as your son, are strangers to me as far as I am individually concerned; but justice must have its course. A man is killed. The case is as serious as it could possibly be. So, move on, gendarmes."

The gendarmes pushed Bernard towards the door.

"Good-bye, father, good-bye, mother," he exclaimed.

Bernard, followed by Mathieu's eager look, which seemed almost to thrust him out of the house, as much as the gendarmes did with their hands, advanced a few paces towards the door.

But it was Catherine who then placed herself in his way.

"And have you nothing for me, Bernard?" she asked.

"*Catherine,*" said the young man in a broken voice, "at

the moment of dying, and of dying innocently, I shall perhaps be able to forgive you, but at this moment I have not the strength to do it."

"Oh! ungrateful man!" exclaimed Catherine, turning away; "I believe him innocent and he believes me guilty."

"Bernard, Bernard!" said Madame Watrin, "before you go, for Heaven's sake, my child, tell your poor mother that you have no ill-feeling against her."

"Mother," said Bernard, with a resignation full of sorrow and dignity, "if I must die, I shall die full of gratitude and respect, thanking Heaven for having given me such good and kind parents."

Then, in his turn, turning to the gendarmes, he said,—

"Now, gentlemen, I am ready."

And in the midst of stifled cries, tears, and sobs, he waved his hand in token of farewell, and advanced towards the door.

But at the threshold he met François, breathless, reeking with perspiration, without his neckkerchief, and with his coat hanging on his arm, who stopped his further progress.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MATHIEU'S TRACES.

At the sight of François, who made an imperative gesture to all not to move another step, it was immediately perceived that he was the bearer of some important intelligence, and, accordingly, every one, with the exception of Bernard, drew a step backward.

Mathieu could not draw back, for the wall of the chimney prevented him moving; but although he seemed to find it somewhat difficult to remain standing up, still he did not resume his seat.

"Ouf!" said François, throwing down his coat, or rather letting it fall on the ground, and leaning against the side of the door, like a man ready to sink with exhaustion.

"Well!" asked the mayor, "what's the matter now? shall we never finish! Gendarmes! to Villers-Cotterets."

But the Abbé Gregoire comprehended that some assistance had arrived.

"Monsieur le Maire," he said, advancing a step, "as this young man has something important to tell us, pray listen to him; is it not true, François, that you have something material to say?"

"Don't put yourselves out," said François to Madame Tellier and Catherine who hurried towards him, while the abbé, Marianne, and Guillaume looked at him, as shipwrecked passengers upon a raft, tempest-tossed upon the ocean, sweep the horizon with their gaze for the vessel that is to save them.

François, then addressing himself to the mayor and to the gendarmes, said,—

"Well, where are you gentlemen going to?"

"François! François!" exclaimed Madame Watrin, "they are taking away my child—my son—my poor Bernard—to prison."

"Oh!" said François, "that's it, is it? Well, he isn't in prison yet, and it's a league and a half from here to Villers-Cotterets, not taking into account either, that old Sylvestre *has gone to* bed, and that there will be some little trouble *to get up again* at this late hour."

"Ah!" said Guillaume, breathing freely once more, for he knew that whenever François spoke in that tone, François's uneasiness on a subject was at an end.

And he filled his pipe, which he had entirely forgotten for the last half hour.

Mathieu moved away unperceived, stole lightly from the chimney-corner to the window, and seated himself upon the window-sill.

"Well, indeed!" said the mayor; "are we the servants of Monsieur François? Go on, gendarmes, go on."

"Beg your pardon, Monsieur le Maire," said François; "but I've got something to say against that."

"Against what?"

"Against the order you have just given."

"And is what you are going to say worth the trouble of saying?" asked the mayor.

"That's for you to judge, I should think; only I give you fair warning, it will be rather a long story."

"Ah! if it's as long as you say, so much the better; it will do for to-morrow in that case."

"Oh, no! Monsieur le Maire," said François; "to do any good, my story must be told this evening."

"My friend," returned the mayor, in a tone of patronising impatience, "as positive statements and information can alone be received as evidence in criminal matters, you will excuse me for dispensing with what you may have to represent. Lead away your prisoner, gendarmes."

"Well," said François, becoming serious, "in that case you will be good enough to listen to me, Monsieur le Maire, for the information I have brought *is* positive."

"Monsieur le Maire!" exclaimed the Abbé Gregoire, "in the name of religion and humanity, I adjure you to listen to this young man."

"And, monsieur," said Guillaume, "in the name of justice, I order you to resume your sitting."

The mayor paused, almost frightened at the magisterial authority of paternal affection. However, not wishing to have the appearance of yielding, he said,—

"Gentlemen, whenever there is a person killed, there must be an assassin."

"Beg your pardon, Monsieur le Maire," interrupted François, "there is an assassin, sure enough, but there's no one killed."

"What do you say—no one killed?" exclaimed the mayor.

"No one killed?" repeated all present.

"What does he say?" said Mathieu.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the abbé.

"Well," resumed François, "supposing I had nothing else to tell you, it seems to me that that alone is something."

"Explain yourself, young man," said the mayor majestically, delighted to avail himself of this good news as a pretext for continuing his investigation.

"Monsieur Chollet was knocked down by the violence of the blow; he fell fainting on the ground from the shock; but the ball was flattened against a purse full of gold which he had in the breast pocket of his coat, and it glided along his side."

"Oh! ah!" said the mayor, "what's that you say, young man—the ball flattened against the purse?"

"That was money very well placed; wasn't it, Monsieur le Maire?" observed François.

"It don't matter whether he is dead or not," replied the mayor; "there has been an attempt to kill."

"Well," continued François, "who says the contrary?"

"Come to facts," said the magistrate.

"That's all I want," said François; "but you keep interrupting me every moment."

"Speak, speak, François," exclaimed all present.

There were two present, however, Bernard and Mathieu, who spoke not a word, but awaited the result with a feverish expectation, which arose in either case from very different feelings.

"Well," said François, "listen, Monsieur le Maire; this is how the whole affair took place——"

"But," observed the magistrate, "how can you possibly know how the matter took place, since you were in this room, at this very table with us, while it all happened half a league away, and you never once left us?"

"I know I didn't quit you, but what then? When I say there is a wild-boar in such a place, it's a male or a female. Have I seen the boar? Not at all: but I've seen his track, and that's all I care for."

François did not even look at or towards Mathieu, but Mathieu did not the less, on that account, feel a cold shiver pass all through him.

"Well, I'll go on now," continued François. "This is how the affair happened: Monsieur Bernard was the first who arrived at Madame Tellier's wine-shop. Isn't that true, *Madame Tellier*?"

"Perfectly," she replied; "what next?"

"He was very much agitated?"

"Yes, that's perfectly true, also."

"Silence!" said the mayor.

"He walked about like this," continued François, taking several long strides up and down the room; "and two or three times, from impatience, he stamped his foot on the ground, close to the little table opposite the door."

"Yes, when waiting for some wine; that, too, is perfectly true," exclaimed Madame Tellier, raising her arms up to heaven, expressive of the admiration with which she regarded François's almost miraculous perspicacity.

Mathieu, with the cuff of his jacket, wiped away the perspiration which began to trickle down his face.

"Oh!" said François, replying to the good woman's exclamation, "that wasn't very difficult to see, for there is the impression of shoes in the gravel much deeper in some places than in others."

"How could you see that in the dark?"

"That's good, and the moon so bright, too. I suppose you fancy the moon is shining up there for nothing else but to make the dogs bark? Well, then, Monsieur Chollet arrived on horseback from the direction of Villers-Cotterets; he got off his horse about thirty paces from Madame Tellier's wine shop, made it fast to a tree, then passed exactly in front of Monsieur Bernard. I almost fancied he must have lost, and then tried to find, something like money, for there was some tallow-grease on the ground, which shows that some one must have been looking there with a candle. During all this time, Monsieur Bernard was hidden behind the beech just opposite to the house, where he went on raging and storming a good deal; the proof is that there were two or three places where the moss had been torn away about the height of his head. After having found what he had been looking for, the Parisian went off in the direction of the Prince's Fountain; he sat down about three or four feet from the fountain, and then got up again; he next advanced two-and-twenty paces towards the Soissons road, and then he was hit by the ball, and fell."

"Oh! that really is so!" cried Catherine.

"To-morrow," said the mayor, "we shall learn who discharged the gun, for we shall find the wads, and the ball will be looked for."

"Oh! there's no need to wait till morrow for that, for I've got them with me."

A ray of joy lighted up Mathieu's livid face.

"What," said the mayor, "you have brought the wads and the ball with you?"

"Yes; the wads, you understand, were in the direction of the shot when it was fired, and there was no difficulty in finding them; but it wasn't so easy to find the ball, for that deuce of a purse, and perhaps the Parisian's side, altered its course a little; but it didn't much matter, for I found it in a beech close by, and here it is."

And François held out to the mayor, in the hollow of his hand, the two wads and the flattened ball.

The mayor, close to whom one of the gendarmes held a light, said,—

"You see, gentlemen, that the wads are made of felt; and as for the ball, although it is flattened and has lost its shape, it still bears the mark of a cross."

"And not a very wonderful thing either," said François, "since they are Bernard's; and as for this cross, he made it this very morning himself on the ball."

"Good heaven, what is he saying?" cried Watrin, catching hold of his pipe, which was on the point of escaping from his trembling jaws.

"He is destroying him!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Ah! that was what I was afraid of," stammered out Mathieu in a feigned tone of pity. "Poor Monsieur Bernard."

"Then you acknowledge that the shot fired was from Bernard's gun?"

"Certainly I do," said François. "The gun was Monsieur Bernard's, the ball was Monsieur Bernard's, and these wads were Monsieur Bernard's; but all that don't prove that it was Monsieur Bernard who fired the shot."

"Oh! oh!" muttered Mathieu; "is it likely he suspects anything?"

"Well, as I've just told you, Monsieur Bernard was in a terrible rage; he stamped his foot on the ground, tore the moss away from the tree, and then when Monsieur Chollet went off, he followed him as far as the foot of the oak-tree; when there, he took aim at him; suddenly changing his mind, he staggered back a few paces, threw his gun on the *ground, for* the mark of the gun, which was cocked, and of the

muzzle, were left in the road, and then he ran away as hard as he could."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Madame Watrin, "what a miracle!"

"What did I tell you, Monsieur le Maire?" observed Bernard.

"Be quiet, Bernard," said his father; "let François speak; don't you see he is upon the scent, the clever hound?"

"Oh! oh!" murmured Mathieu; "this begins to become uncomfortable."

"Well," said François, "some one else then made his appearance."

"Who was that?" asked the mayor.

"Oh! I don't know," said François, winking his eye at Bernard, "for that's all I was able to see."

"All right," said Mathieu; "I breathe again."

"This fellow then caught up the gun, dropped upon one knee, which shows that he is not such a good shot as Bernard, and then fired; and that was the way, as I've told you already, Monsieur Chollet fell."

"But what interest could this third person you speak of have had in killing Monsieur Chollet?"

"Oh, I don't know; to rob him, perhaps."

"How did he know he had any money?"

"Didn't I tell you that I thought the Parisian had let his purse drop close by that little place where Madame Tellier cools her wine? Well, I shouldn't be surprised if the assassin had not been concealed in that very place at the time. I saw the mark of a man there, who had been lying flat on his stomach, and who had dug his hands into the gravel."

"So Monsieur Chollet has been robbed as well, then?" asked Guillaume.

"I should think so, indeed; he has been robbed of a couple of hundred louis, that 's all."

"Forgive me, my poor Bernard," said Guillaume; "I had no idea that the Parisian had been robbed when I asked you if you were his murderer."

"Thank you, father," said Bernard.

"But tell us about this robber," said the mayor.

"Don't I tell you that I don't know who he is; only, while he was running from where he fired the shot to where Monsieur Chollet fell, he broke in a rabbit-hole, and sprained his left foot."

"The foul fiend take this fellow," murmured Mathieu, who felt his hair bristling on his head.

"Upon my word, that's a little too strong!" cried the mayor. "How can you possibly know that he sprained his foot?"

"There's nothing very wonderful in that," replied François. "For a distance of thirty paces the two feet go side by side, without any difference, while, during the rest of the way, one of them was obliged to bear the whole weight of the body, and that one was the right—the other hardly made any mark on the road, and that was the left; consequently, he sprained his left foot, and when he leans on it, why, it hurts him."

"Ah!" muttered Mathieu.

"And that's the very reason why he hasn't made his escape," continued François. "No; if he had run away, he would, by this time, have been five or six leagues from here, particularly since, with the feet he seems to have, he ought to be a good walker. No; he has buried his two hundred louis about twenty feet from the road, and about a hundred feet from this place, between a couple of large bushes at the foot of a birch; there is no difficulty in recognizing it, for it is the only one of its kind—I mean the birch, of course."

Mathieu wiped the perspiration from his face for the second time, and passed one of his legs through the open window to the outside.

"And where did he go to after that?" said the mayor.

"He made his way to the high road, and the high road is paved with large stones—it's there I get puzzled, and I can't make out anything more."

"And the money?"

"The money consists of twenty and forty-franc pieces, Monsieur le Maire."

"You have taken this gold, I suppose, and brought it with you as a proof."

"I should think not, indeed," said François. "I took very good care not to do that—stolen money would burn my fingers."

And he shook his fingers as if he had really burnt them.

"Well, what next?"

"Well," continued François, "I said to myself—'It is much better for the authorities themselves to make a descent upon the spot; and as the robber hasn't the slightest idea that I *know* where he has hidden it, the money will be sure to be *found.*'"

"You're just wrong, there," said Mathieu to himself, as he passed his other leg through the window, and cast a look of hatred at Bernard and François; "the money won't be found, I can tell you."

And he stole away without any one, except François, having perceived his departure.

"Is that all, my man?" asked the mayor.

"Yes—I should hope so, or nearly so at least, Monsieur Raisin," was François's reply.

"Very good; justice will know how to appreciate your deposition. In the mean time, understand this clearly, that as you don't name any one, and as everything is founded upon supposition, the weight of the accusation continues to bear against Bernard."

"Ah! I have nothing to say against that," replied François.

"Consequently, although I am deeply distressed at it, I assure you, Monsieur Guillaume, and you, too, Madame Watrin, Bernard must follow the gendarmes, and go to prison."

"Be it so, Monsieur le Maire. Wife, give me a couple of shirts and whatever else I may need, to remain in prison with Bernard."

"And I, too—and I, too!" cried the mother. "I will follow my son wherever he goes."

"Do as you like; but let us move on."

And the mayor made a sign to the gendarmes, who obliged Bernard to advance towards the door.

But François once more interfered, as he had already done, and placing himself in the way of the prisoner, said,—

"Only one moment, Monsieur le Maire."

"If you have nothing to add to what you have already stated——" replied the mayor.

"No, nothing; but that don't matter. However, just suppose for a moment——" and he looked puzzled, as if he were trying to make out something.

"Suppose what?" asked the mayor.

"Suppose—it's only a supposition, you know—but suppose I *do* know the man who is really guilty, after all."

There was a general exclamation from all present.

"Suppose, for instance," continued François, lowering his voice, "that he was here just now."

"Why, in that case," cried the mayor, "the proof would escape us, and we should be speculating again to no purpose."

"Yes—that's true enough. But one supposition more, and that shall be the last, Monsieur le Maire. Suppose that I

have got Bobineau lying in wait in the right-hand bush, and Lajeunesse in the bush on the left-hand side, and that at the very moment the thief is about to put his hand on the money, they will put their hands on the thief, eh?"

At this moment a loud voice was heard on the high road, like that of a man who would not walk, being made to walk in spite of himself.

"And here he is," said François, with a loud burst of laughter which terminated his sentence; "they have got hold of him, he don't want to come back here, and so they are obliged to make him."

At the same moment, Lajeunesse and Bobineau, holding Mathieu by the collar, appeared at the threshold of the door.

"Will you come along, you rascal?" said Bobineau.

"Come along," said Lajeunesse; "it's no good quarrelling about it."

"Mathieu!" exclaimed every one at once.

"Here, Monsieur le Maire," said Lajeunesse, "is the purse."

"And here is the thief," added Bobineau. "Come and have a little talk with the mayor, my beauty."

And he gave Mathieu a push, and Mathieu, unable to resist the impulse, limped forward a few paces.

"There now," said François; "didn't I tell you that he was lame with his left foot. You will believe me another time, won't you, Monsieur le Maire?"

Mathieu saw that it was no good holding out any longer; he was trapped, and there was nothing left but to make the best of a bad bargain.

"Well, and what then? It *was* I who did the trick, I don't deny it. I only intended to pick a quarrel between Monsieur Bernard and Mademoiselle Catherine, because Monsieur Bernard had struck me. When I saw the gold, that turned my head. Monsieur Bernard had thrown down his gun; the devil tempted me, I picked it up, and you know the rest. But I never premeditated it for a moment; and as the Parisian isn't killed after all, why, I shall get off with ten years at the galleys."

A load seemed removed from everybody's breast, all arms were held out towards Bernard, but Catherine was the first locked in the young man's embrace.

Bernard made a useless effort to press her against his heart, but his hands were tied.

*The Abbé* Grégoire perceived the sorrowful smile which *passed across the* young man's lips.

"Monsieur le Maire," he said, "I trust that you will give directions to set Bernard at liberty immediately."

"Gendarmes, the young man is free," said the mayor; "unfasten his hands."

The gendarmes obeyed.

There was a moment of confusion in which father, mother, child, and affianced bride formed a group from which cries of happiness and sobs of joy arose.

Nobody could help shedding tears; even the mayor could hardly refrain from yielding to the general emotion.

But as Mathieu began to swear at this moment of general joy, the mayor added, addressing the gendarmes and pointing to Mathieu,—

"Convey that man to the prison at Villers-Cotterets, and see that he is well looked after."

"Won't old Sylvestre be put out at being woke up at this hour?" said Mathieu.

And suddenly freeing his hands from the grasp of the gendarmes, who were about to slip on the handcuffs, he imitated the cry of the screech-owl once again, and immediately after, holding out his hands, allowed himself to be handcuffed, and left the house between the gendarmes.

## CHAPTER XX.

### CONCLUSION.

MATHIEU was conducted to the prison at Villers-Cotterets, and locked up under charge of Monsieur Sylvestre, in the stead and place of Bernard Watrin.

When the true criminal was arrested and was being dragged along the high road by the gendarmes; when the mayor had left, hanging down his head and casting a look of repentance behind him; when the excellent inhabitants of the Maison Neuve, restored to each other, and freed from the presence of strangers—for Madame Tellier, the worthy Abbé Grégoire, and lastly Lajeunesse and Bobineau, those two clever actors who had contributed to the *dénoûment* of the drama, together with François, who had tracked the real criminal step by step with an intelligence and a sagacity which would have done honour to the last of the Mohicans, could not be regarded as strangers—there was nothing to interfere with the unrestrained happiness of the whole family.

First of all there was a hearty earnest grasp of the hand between the father and son, the son's grasp saying, "You see that I did not tell you a falsehood, father;" and the father's replying, "You know I did not for one moment suspect you, Bernard."

Next there was a long and passionate embrace between the son and the mother, an embrace in which the mother murmured in a low voice,—

"Oh! when I think that it was all my fault!"

"Hush! don't say another word about it," was Bernard's answer.

"That it was my obstinate folly that was the cause of all."

"Pray don't say such a thing."

"Will you forgive me, my poor, dear child?"

"Oh! my mother, my kind mother."

"In any case, I have been well punished."

"And you will be well rewarded, I hope."

Bernard then went up to the Abbé Grégoire, took hold of both his hands, and looking the good priest in the face, he said,

"Nor did you, Monsieur l'Abbé, suspect me for a *moment?*"

"Did I not know you better than your father and mother?"

"Better, do you say, Monsieur l'Abbé?" said Madame Watrin.

"Yes, indeed, better," said her husband.

"Oh! that's hardly possible," cried the old woman, eager to begin a discussion on the subject; "I should very much like to know who can possibly know a child better than its own mother."

"Why, he who formed the mind after the mother had fashioned the body," said Watrin. "Do *I* say anything against it? So, do as I do, old woman, and hold your tongue."

"No, no! that I won't, indeed; I will never hold my tongue when I'm told that there is some one who knows my son better than I do."

"Yes, mother, yes, you will hold your tongue, I'm sure," said Bernard; "for, to make you do so, I have only to say a single word to a woman as religious as you are." And he then added, laughing, "Have you forgotten that the abbé is my confessor?"

It was now Catherine's turn. Bernard had kept her for the last; and, like a true egotist, only in order to keep her the longer. So, when he came to her, he said, in a voice almost choked by emotion,—

"Catherine, dear Catherine."

"Bernard, my own Bernard," she murmured, with her eyes and her voice full of tears.

"Come away, come away," said Bernard, hurrying her through the door which had remained partially open.

"Well, where are you going to?" cried Madame Watrin, with a movement so rapid that it almost seemed like jealousy.

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders, and, as he filled his pipe, said,—

"To attend to their own affairs, I suppose; let them go, wife, let them go."

"But——"

"Come, come, isn't it likely that, at their age and under similar circumstances, we should have had something to say to each other ourselves?"

"Hum!" was the only answer the mother made as she cast a last look towards the door.

But even had the door been open she would have seen nothing, for the two young people had already reached the wood, and were lost to sight beneath its thick covert.

As for Bobineau, Lajeunesse, François, and Watrin, they had taken their seats at the table and were busily occupied in inspecting the contents of the bottles by the light of the candles, and in ascertaining whether there was anything left in them.

The Abbé Grégoire took advantage of this interesting occupation of the four keepers to take his cane and hat very quietly, glided softly through the half-opened door, and returned home to Villers-Cotterets, where he found his sister, Madame Adélaïde Grégoire, waiting his return in the greatest anxiety.

The two women, Madame Watrin and Madame Tellier, sat down together in the chimney-corner and began to unwind a skein of words which, because it was unwound in an under-tone, was not on that account either the less long or the less entangled.

At the first rays of the returning day Bernard and Catherine reappeared at the threshold of the door, like two birds which, having gone away together, had returned together. Catherine, with a bright smile on her lips and taking her eyes as little as possible off her lover, went up to Madame Watrin, and kissing first her and then Watrin, began to mount the staircase to her own room.

But she had scarcely moved away a single step from the table where the four men were sitting, to the door leading to the staircase, when Bernard stopped her, as if she had forgotten something.

"Well!" he said, in a tone of gentle reproach.

Catherine had no occasion to ask what he meant, for Bernard was promptly understood by a heart which was kindred to his own in its sensitiveness and delicacy.

She approached François, and held up her face to him.

"What?" asked François, quite astonished at such a godsend.

"She kisses you as a way of thanking you," said Bernard. "I think we owe you that at least."

"Ah!" cried François,—"ah! Mademoiselle Catherine." And he wiped his mouth with his handkerchief and imprinted a ringing kiss upon each of the young girl's blushing cheeks.

And then Catherine, holding out her hand for the last time to Bernard, went up to her bedroom.

"Come along, my boys!" said the latter, "it is high time for us to begin our rounds. We have something else to do besides being happy; we must see that the Duke of Orleans' *work is* attended to."

And taking up, with a look at it which it would be impossible to render, the gun which the gendarmes had brought with them as a proof of his complicity, with one of its barrels discharged,—

"When I think," he murmured—"well! it's all over now." And thrusting his hat on his head, he called out to his companions, "Now, let us be off."

As Bernard left the house he looked up and saw Catherine at her window, gazing, with her lips wreathed in smiles, at the rising sun, which was about to illumine one of her happy days. When she perceived Bernard, she plucked a pink growing in a pot at the window, kissed it, and threw it to him.

Bernard caught the flower before it fell to the ground, intercepted the kiss which lay concealed among its perfumed leaves, and placed the pink in his breast; and then, followed by his three comrades, he strode into the forest.

The returning day summoned Madame Tellier to her canteen. She took leave of her friends the Watrins, and made her way towards her own little house near the Prince's Fountain, with the same hurried step that had brought her to the Maison Neuve, carrying away with her a budget of news which would be sufficient to enliven her conversation during the whole day.

Bernard innocent, Mathieu guilty; Catherine's and Bernard's marriage fixed for a fortnight hence. A long, long period had elapsed since a subject of so much interest had been handed over to the gossips of the village.

A struggle, arising from kind and devoted feelings for each other, ensued between Guillaume and Marianne, each wishing to send the other to bed, and insisting upon sitting up to take care of the house. As, owing to Madame Watrin's obstinacy of purpose, this conflict of self-abnegation threatened to degenerate into a quarrel, Guillaume put on his hat, thrust his hands into his pockets, and went out to take a walk on the high road leading to Villers-Cotterets.

When he reached the Stag's Leap, he saw Monsieur Raisin coming the opposite way, in a little covered vehicle, with his old servant Pierre by his side.

No sooner did he see the mayor than Watrin made a movement as if to betake himself to the forest, but not before he had been recognized.

Monsieur Raisin stopped his horse, jumped out of the vehicle, and ran towards the head-keeper, calling out,—

"Hallo, Monsieur Watrin! hallo!"

Watrin was obliged to stop.

Watrin's motive for wishing to avoid a meeting with the mayor was a feeling of delicacy which most men have at the bottom of their hearts, extending to and including others as well as themselves, and making them blush for others when these latter do certain acts which cannot precisely be characterized as honest.

The reader may perhaps remember that the propositions which the timber-merchant had made the preceding evening to Watrin were not altogether of the most honourable kind. When, therefore, Watrin stopped at the summons, he could not help asking himself what it could possibly be that the mayor wanted.

He waited with his back turned towards the mayor, nor did he turn round until the latter was close beside him.

"Well!" he said abruptly to M. Raisin, "what's the matter now?"

"The fact is, Monsieur Watrin," said the mayor, in evident embarrassment, and taking off his hat to speak to the old keeper who listened to him with his hat upon his head—"the fact is, that ever since I left you this morning, I have been thinking a good deal."

"Have you, indeed," said Watrin, "and what about?"

"About everything, dear Monsieur Watrin, and particularly about this: that it is neither good nor proper to wish to get hold of your neighbour's property, even though your neighbour be a prince."

"What's your reason for telling me that, monsieur, and what property have I ever wished to get hold of?" asked the old man.

"My dear Monsieur Watrin," continued the mayor with a certain humility of address, "how can you suppose my remark had any reference to you?"

"And whom did you mean to refer to, then?"

"To myself alone, Monsieur Watrin, and to those very improper proposals I made to you last night about the trees which immediately border my purchase."

"Very good, and so it's that which brings you back, is it?"

"Why not, if I have felt that I was wrong, and that I *owed* some apologies to an excellent and honourable man *whom I* had insulted?"

"I? You never insulted me, Monsieur le Maire?"

"Yes, indeed. You insult an honest man when you make proposals to him which he cannot accept except by giving the lie to his whole life."

"It was hardly worth your while to put yourself out for such a little matter as that, Monsieur Raisin."

"You call that a little matter when a man is compelled to blush before his fellow-man, and is afraid to hold out his hand when he meets him! I call that a very serious matter, monsieur, I do. And so I ask you to forgive me, Monsieur Watrin."

"I?" asked the old keeper.

"Yes, you."

"I am not the Abbé Grégoire to forgive you," said the old man, half touched, yet half laughing.

"No, but you are Monsieur Watrin, and all honest men belong to one family. I have left it for a minute or two; give me your hand to help me back again, Monsieur Watrin."

The mayor pronounced these words in a tone so profoundly moved, that the tears came to the old man's eyes. He took off his hat with one hand, as he would have done to the Inspector Deviolaine, and held out the other to the mayor.

The latter seized it immediately, and squeezing it as if he would crush it, had not the old keeper's hand been made of very substantial materials,—

"And now, Monsieur Watrin, this is not all."

"How so?" asked the keeper.

"No, there is something more."

"What is it, then, Monsieur Raisin?"

"The fact is, that I was unjust towards others beside yourself last night."

"Ah! you mean your accusation against Bernard. You see, Monsieur le Maire, we shouldn't be in too great a hurry to accuse others."

"I see, monsieur, that my anger against you rendered me unjust, and had almost made me commit an action for which I shall feel remorse during the whole of my life, if Monsieur Bernard does not forgive me."

"Oh! don't let that make you uneasy, Monsieur le Maire, for Bernard is so happy that he has forgotten everything already."

"That may be, Monsieur Watrin; but he may think of it

some time or another; and then he might shake his head and say between his teeth, 'Ah! it don't matter, Monsieur le Maire is a bad-hearted man all the same.'"

"True enough," said Watrin, laughing; "I can't say for certain that when he's a little put out, the affair might not recur to him for a moment or so."

"There is a means; not that the affair shouldn't recur to him—for a man isn't master of his recollections—but that whenever he thinks of the affair he may drive it away."

"What is that?"

"That he forgives me as cordially and sincerely as you have just done."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I can answer for him as I can for myself, for Bernard has no more malice in his nature than a chicken. So you may look upon that matter as already settled; and if you should think it necessary, and to save you any trouble about it, and as, indeed, he is, by far, the younger of the two, he shall call upon you."

"I certainly do hope he will call upon me, and will stay there too; and not he only, but you, Madame Watrin, and Catherine, and François, and all the keepers in your district."

"Very well. And when shall we do so?"

"After the marriage ceremony."

"Oh! no, thank you, Monsieur Raisin."

"Don't say no, Monsieur Watrin, it's quite settled; unless, indeed, you and your son are really determined to bear an ill-feeling towards me. I have got it into my head that I must give the wedding dinner. I had hardly gone to bed when I returned home after I left you last night, than that idea got into my head, to such an extent, indeed, as to prevent me getting to sleep. Besides, I have drawn out the bill of fare."

"But, Monsieur Raisin——"

"First of all, there will be a ham belonging to the boar you killed yesterday, or rather that François killed; then the inspector will, I know, be obliging enough to let us have a young buck killed; I will go myself to the fish-ponds at la Ramée, to choose the fish; your wife shall make the stews, since she knows how to make them better than anybody else; then, we have some capital champagne which came direct from Epernay, and some old Burgundy which only wants to *be drunk* as soon as possible."

"*Still,* Monsieur Raisin——"

"No ifs, no buts, and no stills, Guillaume, or I shall certainly say, 'Come, Raisin, you must indeed, be a good-for-nothing fellow, since you have quarrelled with the best people in the world for the rest of your life.'"

"I can't answer with certainty for anything, Monsieur le Maire."

"Oh! if you can't answer for anything, as you say, why it will be a bad look out for the women, for it is the women, you see, Madame Raisin and Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, who have filled my head with a heap of stupid, jealous ideas. Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé was quite right in saying, that from time immemorial it has always been through the women that the men have been ruined."

Watrin was perhaps still disposed to resist, when he felt some one pull him by his coat. He turned round, and saw old Pierre.

"Oh! Monsieur Watrin," said the poor fellow, "don't refuse Monsieur le Maire what he asks, in the name of——, in the name of——"

And old Pierre sought, apparently in vain, for the name of something in which he could invoke Guillaume's compassion.

"Ah!" said he suddenly, "in the name of the two five-franc pieces which you gave Monsieur l'Abbé for me, when you learnt that Monsieur le Maire had sent me away and taken Mathieu into his service instead."

"That was another idea which those confounded women put into my head. Oh! the women, the women! your wife is a saint, and she is the only one I know, Monsieur Watrin."

"What, my wife?" cried Watrin! "Oh! oh! I can see very well——"

Watrin was going to say, 'I can see very well that you don't know her;' but he checked himself in time, and laughing, completed his phrase by saying,—

"I can see very well, that you know her!"

Then looking at the mayor, who was waiting for his final answer, in great anxiety, he said,—

"Well, then, it's a settled thing. We will all dine at your house on the wedding-day."

"And the wedding will take place a week earlier than you fancy," cried Monsieur Raisin.

"How do you mean?" asked the old keeper.

"Guess where I am going!"

"When?"

"Now, at once."

"Where you are going?"

"Yes. Well, I'm going to Soissons, to buy a dispensation from the bishop."

And the mayor entered the vehicle with old Pierre.

"Well," said Watrin, laughing, "I will answer for Bernard now. Had you acted a dozen times as badly towards him as you have done, he would have forgiven you as easily as he will be sure to do now."

Monsieur Raisin whipped his horse, while Guillaume followed the vehicle with such an earnest gaze, and with his mind so preoccupied, that he forgot to keep his pipe alight.

When the carriage had disappeared, he said,—

"Well, I had no idea he was such a good sort of a fellow;" and as he struck a light, he added, "he's quite right—it *is* the women, after all. Oh! the women—the women!" he murmured, between each puff of smoke.

And, shaking his head, he returned with a slow and pensive step towards the Maison Neuve.

A fortnight afterwards, thanks to the dispensation which Monsieur Raisin had obtained by purchase from the bishop of Soissons, the organ was pealing forth its music joyously in the little church of Villers-Cotterets, while Bernard and Catherine were kneeling before the Abbé Grégoire.

Madame Raisin and her daughter, Mademoiselle Euphrosyne, kneeling upon velvet-covered chairs embroidered with their initials, were present at the ceremony, but at a little distance from the other guests.

Mademoiselle Euphrosyne was looking tenderly at the handsome Parisian, somewhat pale from the recent attempt upon his life, but still sufficiently recovered to be present at the ceremony. But it was very evident that Monsieur Chollet was far differently employed, and was looking at the lovely bride, blushing under her wreath of orange-blossom, rather than at Mademoiselle Euphrosyne.

The inspector, together with all the members of his family, were also present at the ceremony; he was surrounded by his thirty or forty foresters, like a guard of honour.

The Abbé Grégoire delivered an address, which did not last more than ten minutes, but which had the effect of dissolving every one in tears.

As they were quitting the church, a stone, thrown with

considerable violence, fell in the middle of the marriage party, but fortunately without hurting any one. The stone was projected from the interior of the prison, which was separated from the church merely by a narrow passage. They perceived Mathieu's face behind the bars of one of the windows. It was he who had just thrown the stone.

When he saw that they observed him, he put both his hands together and imitated the cry of the screech-owl.

"Hallo, Monsieur Bernard," he cried, "you know that the cry of the screech-owl bodes ill-luck."

"Yes," replied François; "but when the prophet is a bad one, the prediction is false."

And the marriage party moved on, leaving the prisoner grinding his teeth in fruitless rage.

The next day Mathieu was transferred from the prison of Villers-Cotterets to that of Laon, where the assizes of the department are held.

And, as he had himself anticipated, he was condemned to the galleys for ten years.

Eighteen months afterwards, the journals, among the list of "Accidents and Offences," contained the following piece of intelligence:—

"It is stated in the *Sémaphore* of Marseilles, that an evasion has just been attempted from the galleys of Toulon, which was unsuccessful for the convict who attempted to escape.

"One of the convicts, who had procured a file, it is not known by what means, had succeeded in filing away the ring of the chain round his leg, and in concealing himself under a pile of wood in the timber-yard, where the galley-slaves work.

"At nightfall he reached the sea-shore by crawling along in such a way as to escape the observation of the sentinel, who, however, at the sound of some one plunging into the water, turned round and took aim at the fugitive at the very moment the latter rose to the surface of the sea for the purpose of taking breath. At the end of a few seconds, he reappeared; the soldier then fired at him.

"The fugitive disappeared, but this time to be seen no more.

"The report of the sentinel's musket at once brought a body of soldiers and others connected with the establishment upon the scene; two or three boats were immediately launched, but the search for the fugitive, or even for his corpse, was in vain.

"On the following day only, towards ten o'clock in the morning, a lifeless body was seen floating on the surface of the water; it was that of the convict who had attempted to make his escape the previous evening.

"The unfortunate man, condemned to ten years of the galleys for a premeditated attempt at assassination, but accompanied by extenuating circumstances, was merely inscribed at the galleys under the name of *Mathieu*."

THE END.

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